

1999

Success Stories : A Means of Enhancing the Personal-Professional Development of Teachers

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**Success stories: a means of enhancing the personal-professional
development of teachers**

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Education

31 March, 1999

This thesis details my experiences and findings as a teacher-researcher of narrative inquiry. To address the effectiveness of teacher story sharing as a means of enhancing teacher personal-professional development, I formed a 'story group' with four teacher participants, three of whom were at the pre-service level. The participants collaboratively engaged in the narrative processes of story sharing, story writing, reflection and story critiquing with myself shifting between the roles of researcher, facilitator and participant. Hence, the participants engaged in research about their peers, as well as about themselves, and their practice. In this way, knowledge was shared and jointly constructed, making it an educative experience for both the participants and myself.

Specifically, I wanted to discover whether or not teachers are able to learn by creating "success" stories about what they do. As well as this, I wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of sharing and constructing such stories with other teachers. That is, can knowledge be generated and profitably used by networks of teacher story sharers?

By engaging in the research process I found that teachers can learn by creating and sharing "success" stories about what they do. I also found that teachers learn best in 'collaborative' and 'participatory' ways. Such ways allow teachers to gain useful knowledge about themselves and their practice, as well as their relation to the world of teaching and learning.

However, I also discovered and believe that teachers learn through a third avenue – an avenue that engages teachers in the process of critical reflection. Such reflection goes beyond the surface and superficial meanings and addresses the deeper issues underlying the story.

I learned that teachers who engage in the processes of story sharing, writing, reflection and critiquing have the opportunity to learn in ways that enhance their personal-professional development. Furthermore, such processes are best undertaken with two or more people in relaxed and supportive environments. I also believe that teachers who engage in narrative processes collaboratively have a powerful resource to sustain their commitment to primary school teaching.

Finally, I believe there are several other reasons why teachers should engage in the processes of story sharing, writing, reflection and critiquing. Firstly, the knowledge gained by the participants can help to break down barriers of teacher and school isolation. Secondly, it enables teachers to arm themselves with knowledge that can promote the profession of teaching to the community. And thirdly, it gives teachers the chance to generate their *own* knowledge – knowledge that is both ‘educative’ and empowering, serving to encourage meaningful teacher change and development.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.*

For Grandad who knows me best

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for their love and support, Barry and Carol for their solid belief in me from the very beginning, Carol for her creativity, insight and real talents for listening and inspiring – *thank-you*, and Marg for her enthusiastic approach to recruiting.

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Introduction:

A personal case for storytelling...

Like all good storytellers I will start from the beginning.

After three years of hard work I found myself adopting the title of Primary School Teacher. I was no longer a student, I was a teacher. I felt strange and new, inexperienced, but I felt good – content that I had chosen the right profession. After completing all of my coursework I started to reflect upon how I had become a teacher. How did it happen? When did it happen? Did I realise that it was happening? What were the turning points in my development as a teacher? What things initiated change in my practice and what it means to teach, to be a teacher? I was puzzled but came to the conclusion that I had learned a lot of things, a lot of very valuable things. I knew that teaching would be challenging but I also knew that it was something that I could do, something that I wanted to do and wanted to do well.

I found Carr and Kemmis' (1986) classification a useful way of conceptualising my own development as a teacher. Reflecting on this journal entry I believe that I have learned through three main avenues of knowing and learning.

Firstly, a *technical* way of knowing and learning (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 35) through attending lectures, tutorials and workshops in various subject areas such as Language Arts, Mathematics and Art Education. I also developed by studying aspects of the curriculum, management, educational policies, child development, teacher accountability, special needs and the politics of schooling in core education units.

Secondly, a *practical* way of knowing and learning (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 36), through teaching practices and by participating in individual and group tutorial presentations and practical workshops – “hands-on” experimenting and sampling of resources and teaching strategies.

And thirdly, a *personal-professional* way of knowing and learning (Holly, 1989), by engaging in reflective and critical journalling, through peer and mentor storytelling – the swapping and sharing of stories relevant to the world of teaching and through positive and constructive peer and mentor feedback.

Such thinking regarding the uses of technical, practical and personal-professional teacher knowledge led to my initial interest in the perceptions of

pre-service teachers regarding what it means to be a teacher. For a period of several months I undertook reading in and around the areas of teacher perceptions, pre-service teachers, reflective practice, case study methods, collective memory work and the process of personal-professional journalling. I also read specifically around the methodology of narrative. Teacher narratives also formed a large part of my study. Re-reading my journals, I discovered that my thinking shifted back and forth from my original interest in pre-service teacher perceptions, however, as I pulled back the layers I realised that my interest in the telling and sharing of teacher narratives was strong and one that gradually grew over time. Keen to get started with my research straight away, I found it difficult, when encouraged (several times!) to let my interest area and final topics of study evolve naturally. I am used to having structure and just “getting on with it”. Hence, it was a personal challenge for me to keep journalling, reading and reflecting without actually knowing where it was all heading. But the seemingly slow and painful journey was very much worth it as I arrived at a series of questions that greatly interested me. As well as this I was able to see myself growing with the topic during the months to come.

The specific piece of text that captured my attention was the following:

In moments of discouragement, teachers will also draw upon their reservoirs of success stories as a source of strength and support. (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xvii)

This particular statement was the initial inspiration for my interest in the telling and sharing of teacher narratives. Jalongo and Isenberg's text, *Teachers' stories: From personal narrative to professional insight* was accessible, relevant to me as a beginning teacher, indeed to all teachers, and effectively written as a collection of stories interspersed with meaningful reflections. As I read through the stories I came to realise the power of stories to communicate with their audience.

I envisaged Jalongo and Isenberg's "reservoirs" holding the keys to confidence, inspiration and self-development for every kind of teacher and at all stages of their careers. Through further reading I built up a personal rationale for narrative and for my own research design.

This was the result of some further reflective writing thus:

8 February 1998

"In moments of discouragement, teachers will also draw upon their reservoirs of success stories as a source of strength and support (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xvii)." Student teachers can do this too – draw upon success stories from their past and their more recent past and find ways of becoming inspired, of tapping into personally significant moments of success. Such successes could only serve to enhance their pictures of themselves

– *themselves as teachers in the making.*

I came to understand that a key source of learning for me was the collection of a bank of success stories, my own and others, which I used to:

- Reflect and learn.
- Build personal confidence and efficacy.
- Sustain my commitment to my chosen profession of primary school teaching.

Brubacher, Case and Reagan (1994, p. 19) assert that reflective practice is very much concerned with the *empowerment* of teachers. Catherine Fosnot (1989) cited in Brubacher, et al. (1994, p. 19) believes that a reflective teacher is an empowered teacher, a teacher who understands teaching to be “a facilitating process” that enhances and enriches professional development. Hence, not only does reflective practice – critical thinking around teaching and learning in the form of stories – empower teachers it also serves to build teacher confidence and self-efficacy. According to Killion and Todnem (cited in Brubacher, et al., p. 20) engaging in “reflection-for-practice” guides teachers’ future actions and thus helps to sustain their commitment to teaching.

One way in which teachers can reflect upon their practice is through storytelling. Mattingly (cited in Schon, 1991, p. 235) claims that the act of storytelling is both a “learning tool” and a way of unveiling “underlying values and

assumptions". By being aware of our values and beliefs as teachers we are able to make more informed decisions about future classroom practice. Mattingly further asserts that the process of storytelling, and indeed critical reflection, is a way of "denaturalising" how teachers view their own practice and makes more pronounced their "recognition of the interpretive nature of their work". Hence, the beauty of stories lies in their capacity to clearly render meaning and situational particularities and their potential to help teachers learn from their experience. Clandinin and Connelly (cited in Schon, 1991, p. 259) capture the nature of storytelling in education succinctly when they state that:

Deliberately storying and restorying one's life is, therefore, a fundamental method of personal growth: It is a fundamental quality of education.

To demonstrate my point, three different success stories are included below. The first is a success story from my own teaching experience. The second is a success story shared by two fellow pre-service teachers and the final story details a successful teaching experience of several of my peers.

August 1996 – "*Plasticine Pyramids*"

I had to teach a mathematics lesson on three-dimensional objects.

I wasn't a confident teacher of mathematics at the best of times but mathematics involving "space" didn't scare me as much as

the “number stuff”. I had to teach the children about the inner faces of three-dimensional objects and their shapes. For example, a cylindrical object’s inner faces, when cut in half, form the shape of a rectangle and a cone that is cut makes two triangular inner faces. The children had previously handled and studied various three-dimensional objects as well as completed various shape activities, however, trying to convey this concept with words simply didn’t work. I thought and thought and finally hit upon the idea of using plasticine to make the objects and a knife to cut through them, visually showing the children what shapes resulted. I taught the lesson in the period before recess and the children just came alive near the end of the session. I had saved the cutting exercise until last and ended up turning it into a guessing game – ‘Guess the inside shape’. The children just loved it. The bell went for recess but nobody made a move, the whole class and their sparkling eyes remained glued to the cutting table. It was great – the children just learned so much through something so simple and so visual.

Second Semester, 1995 – “B. B. Bones”

Two fellow education students and myself had to give a “creative and informative” tutorial presentation to our Education class. We

basically had 30 minutes to “go banana” with a theme of our choice and show how it could be applied in the classroom. My friends and I decided to develop and perform an infotainment type program for kids – something similar – to Totally Wild. We brainstormed heaps of ideas but chose what we thought would work best on the day. Everything fell into place nicely. Joe was able to use his family’s video camera to record “live” footage and he also got permission to “borrow” a class of Year Ones; I had access to a skeleton mask; Kate had a bus license and access to a school bus; and we were allowed to use the Science Department’s collection of skulls. For the show Joe took on the role of Ranger Joe, Kate adopted the role of Ranger Kate and I became B. B. Bones – ribcage and all! Our infotainment children’s program went something like this:

The borrowed Year One class had to pile onto the school bus with B. B. Bones in tow and hold up some letters which spelt, “The Magical Mystery Bone Tour.” The three of us then went down to the Green Patch in Ranger Joe’s 4WD and planted the pig, cow and horse skulls. Ranger Joe and Ranger Kate filmed B. B. Bones prancing through the grass and stumbling upon the skulls. The two rangers then proceeded to ask questions of the viewers. The final segment involved us making a trip to one of the local beaches

where B. B. Bones was once again filmed stumbling across a skeleton – a fish skeleton. B. B. Bones was then buried in a sand dune whereupon Ranger Joe “discovered” a human skeleton!

It was a team effort and we all gained something from it. It was loads of fun and we achieved a grand response from our audience and lecturer. The time and effort was definitely worth it.

Second Semester, 1997

For our last assignment in Mathematics Education we had to develop a package for teachers that made use of one or more pieces of mathematics equipment. Several of my peers had this great idea of writing a “Pick-a-Path” story incorporating a range of mathematical concepts and understandings. It was fantastic! One of them drew cartoon like characters for the pictures and they had it bound into a book complete with a separate teacher’s resource book. They went to a lot of effort and the rest of us were in awe – the creativity of teachers is definitely a trait to be tapped into and developed as learning can take on a whole new meaning for us and the kids.

As these stories show, the processes of “storying and restorying” (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993, p. 11) are an important part of teacher education. These stories reflect ‘storying’ at different stages of teacher development and having them “in print” allows teachers to build a positive self-image; it also allows them to look back at their limitations and to measure the growth of their own understanding about teaching and learning.

Through this second line of thinking and reflection I became interested in the possibility of using this natural resource of teacher narratives in a more systematic way. I saw it as a means of enabling pre-service teachers to reflect and learn, build personal confidence and efficacy and sustain a commitment to their chosen profession of primary school teaching. By aiming to be systematic I hoped to get the pre-service teachers to get their successes down in writing. Collective reflection and the use of a “story group” would also help to keep the study systematic. My intention was to design a research project that was systematic in this way, and yet *participatory* and *educative*. The term ‘participatory’ comes from the Action Research tradition that assumes three main focuses regarding the role of research participants. The first focus suggests that participants are co-researchers who participate and collaborate “in all phases of the research process” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 23). The second key point asserts the need for participants to engage fully in “collective self-reflective enquiry”, that is, the participants must own fully the purpose and processes of their research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5). And finally, it

would be the participants who would benefit from the knowledge generated as it would have been they who had carried out the processes in a participatory and collaborative way. Furthermore, they would have engaged in self-research, that is, research *about them* and undertaken *by them*. In essence, action research is about improvement “grounded in the principle of ‘participation’” (Grundy, 1998, p. 16).

The term “educative” (Gitlin, et al., 1992) refers to both the process of narrative – storytelling – and the final product of a polished and personally meaningful success story. The group would own the knowledge generated by the workshops and power would be *shared*. My roles would be diverse comprising the three different roles of participant, facilitator and researcher. I would acknowledge to the story group that I was, and would always remain, the researcher, however I would adopt the roles of facilitator and participant during the writing workshops. My reason for stating the foundational understandings of the story group at the very beginning would be to secure in their minds that the practices of actively owning knowledge and sharing power are crucial elements of their own professional and personal growth.

My hope was that the participating pre-service teachers would be able to tap into a significant teaching experience of success – a moment in time when they experienced and knew success. I believe that success stories are a resource because they have so much potential for the participants – the players and

authors of the stories. Calkins (1994, p. 7) captures this sense of the transformative power of personal narrative well when she

I write to hold what I find in my hands and to declare it a treasure.

* * *

Conceptual Issues:

The power of stories...

The act of sharing narratives is natural to teachers. It is something that they do while on duty in the playground or over coffee in the staff room and often hurriedly while en route to their classrooms. They do not actively go about the process of writing a narrative in their minds word-for-word, they just do it – effectively and often unaware of the power of what they relate. Furthermore, teachers do not relate situations and events that are boring or irrelevant, rather they tell stories that are both meaningful and relevant. Jalongo and Isenberg (1994, p. 153) believe that narrative is a “natural vehicle for teachers to listen to each other and to themselves”. Humans, assert Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2), are “storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives”. Storytelling comes easily to teachers; stories are tools for making meaning, for learning, and for being heard. According to Bruner (1990), human beings make meaning of the world and the things that happen to them through storying. That is, we construct our life experiences in ways that effectively incorporate the components of narratives, selecting and shaping the details of our experience so that they “make sense”. Hence, it could be said that narrative coherence is more important to our sense of self than the actual “truth” of experiences.

Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. xvii) define story as a phenomenon and a process that is within every teacher's reach: "It is primarily through story...that teachers organize their thinking." Storytelling is not something new to teachers, nor is it something they have to learn and adopt as a part of their practice – it is already very much a part of both their personal and professional lives. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. 31) go on to say that personal narratives are an effective means by which teachers can "arrange, understand, and organize their experiences, giving them a shape, a theme, a frame." Through running a series of writing workshops I hoped that the participants would diligently go about the process of giving their teaching successes – the "theme" – a shape defined by personally relevant meanings and understandings. Part of this desire to have the teachers engage in the art of "shaping" was to get them to "shape the landscape of their minds for the whole of their lives (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 77)." I know this is a fairly romantic view of writing, however, I really hoped that actively tapping into and critically reflecting upon their successes the participating teachers would be able to develop their teaching selves in positive and empowering ways. My aim was to encourage the teachers to plant trees of success in their minds; I wanted it to be something that was ongoing and natural. I saw this process to be an effective means of initiating self-directed personal and professional growth in the teachers.

However, can storytelling alone foster this growth, or is there a need for

reflection that is both systematic and critical? According to Tripp (1993) teacher-researchers should be engaging in socially critical processes of reflection. Tripp (1993) argues that reflection only incorporates the perceptions of the various actors involved whereas socially critical reflection concentrates on power relationships and the broader social issues. That is, the former deals with relationships but not to the extent that is necessary for understanding what is really happening in social contexts. Tripp (1993) suggests that by concentrating on the obvious or surface meanings we may be missing the important and deeper issues such as equity and justice. In essence, it is about placing stories in social contexts (Smyth, 1992) rather than just viewing them at face value.

Goodson (1995, p. 98) also advocates the need to place stories in their larger social and political contexts when he asserts:

We need to move from life stories to life histories, from narratives to genealogies of context, towards a modality that embraces *stories of action within theories of context*. In so doing, stories can be 'located', seen as the social constructions they are, fully impregnated by their location within power structures and social milieux.

Goodson is suggesting that there is a need for teacher storytellers and researchers to go "beyond the personal" and like Tripp (1993), to get below the surface and how things seem at first glance through real processes of socially critical reflection. Tripp (1993) believes that we need to look at our teaching

experiences in new ways, ways that challenge and confront the things we normally take for granted. Taking a critical view of our experiences forces us to ask why as opposed to just accepting things as “normal, fine, successful” (Tripp, 1993, p. 15). I will return to this point later, but in the meantime, this study is about “success” stories.

In my proposed plan of study my participants were to firstly listen to themselves through reflection and storying and then to others as they shared their own teaching successes. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. 153) advocate narrative as “a natural vehicle” for listening to others and to yourself. And through the act of listening to stories, people are invited to formulate their own understandings and meanings of the shared situation and in this way are contributing to the understanding of their own practice. As Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. 174) assert:

Planning to share a story helps us view our experiences in new ways because as we plan, we must first ‘talk’ to ourselves about what happened in the classroom, so we come to our own understanding first. The process of story-making itself offers the opportunity to look at ourselves from two viewpoints: as a participant in the experience and as a participant in the story.

I see the benefits of collaborative story sharing to include:

•

- Written text is a concrete piece of data, something that can be revisited and relived at any time (Campbell – Evans & Maloney, 1998, p. 29).
- Data written down is a perfect way of holding time still and critically reflecting upon your practice (Hogan, 1998). It is a way of tapping into your personal beliefs and understandings about teaching – a means of searching for those deeper meanings and issues personally significant to you.
- Having access to meaningful stories is an opportunity for teachers to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of themselves as teachers – teachers on a journey (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 7).
- The writing workshops will be a possible forum for teacher storytellers to be heard; a way of sharing stories in meaningful and professionally relevant ways. I believe that such a story group could serve to promote the profession of teaching to the community if the stories were made accessible in written form. Such promotion could help to counter the negative images of teachers in the press and enhance the professional status of teaching.
- The act of writing and the sharing of stories builds confidence, individual and collective, in teachers as they are contributing to their own knowledge as well as to the knowledge of others.

Calkins, in talking about classroom writing (1994, p. 19), describes:

In the workshop children write about what is alive and vital and real for them – and other writers in the room listen and extend and guide, laugh and cry and marvel.

This is how I imagined the story group to be: a forum where teachers could share their stories and listen attentively to the stories of others. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) suggest that a good teaching story evokes related stories of our own, that is, it has the ability to ‘resonate’ with our past and present experiences in ways that allow us to interact with the story’s themes. Storytelling is particularly relevant to teachers. Clandinin, Davies, Hogan and Kennard (1993, p. 137) assert that stories are a part of every teacher’s “personal practical knowledge”. Carter (1993, p. 6-8) believes that there are primarily two ways of engaging in storytelling namely:

- * “Well-remembered events – short stories elicited from a beginner’s stream of experience.”
- * “Teachers’ personal stories – events that are framed within a context of a teacher’s life history...central themes are often moral and philosophical, having more to do with feelings, purposes, images, aspirations, and personal meanings....It is teaching... ‘up close’ rather than ‘out there’ and closely linked to teachers as researchers.”

I hoped that the generated success stories would be a mixture of the two. That is, that they would be personal stories elicited from the pre-service teachers' beginning "stream of

Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 20) believe that narrative inquiry is purposeful and has the capacity to "make a difference in the lives of others". I hoped that the story group and its processes would serve to make a difference in the participants' lives; such differences would include a mutual respect for others in the group, an appreciation for teachers in general and collective personal-professional development. I also hoped that the group would have the potential to make a difference in the lives of the children they would teach.

Cathro (1995, p. 56-7) suggests that narrative "is 'both a process and a product' and a means through which people – teachers – are able to translate their 'knowing' into 'telling'. The participants of my research were to engage in both the process of narrative – the telling and reliving of personally significant stories – and the product of narrative, the written story of success. And in critically analysing the narratives at both the process and product levels the participants will achieve a story that "renders clear the meanings inherent" in their successes of teaching practice (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 76). Both the processes and products of narrative are attractive as they have the capacity to capture the personal and social "life experiences" in relevant and meaningful ways" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10).

As way of summary, I believe that the articulation of success stories of teaching practice can serve to enhance the personal and professional development of pre-service teachers. By engaging in the above processes as a group, collaboratively, the pre-service teachers would be able to make the act of storytelling a powerful learning tool as knowledge and power would be shared amongst all group members. That is, all story group members would have the opportunity to enhance: their skills in reflection; their personal and professional confidence and efficacy; and, their commitment to primary school teaching. Furthermore, by reflecting on their stories the participants would be able to go *beyond* their experience and capture its significance, avoiding the sense of alienation and futility suggested in T. S. Eliot's ("The Dry Salvages", 1941) lines:

We had the experience but missed the meaning.

Due to clear time boundaries, I did not plan to have the participants capture meaning through the 'socially critical reflection' Tripp (1993) writes about. Instead, I planned to have the participating teachers engage in reflection that was success and person-teacher oriented. That is, reflection that focused on the "success" in stories embedded in children and classroom teaching.

* * *

The Research Process:

Story Groups and Storytellers...

Research processes are normally streamlined and sanitised in theses and reports, however I have made the decision to include some of them in my account. I have chosen to do this so that I am able to tell my story in a way that renders my experience truthfully. I also want to capture a sense of the 'whole', relating my experience in real and meaningful ways.

My honours year has been a challenging one. When I submitted my proposal and delivered my presentation, I never dreamed that I would have any trouble finding participants to work with. In fact, I was so optimistic that I thought I would be knocking people back. But no, this was not to be the case.

I invited the first, second and third year education students from Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, through the form of an invitational memo in their access files. During the three weeks that followed I did not receive any responses. At the beginning of the fourth week a second year student called Aemee volunteered her assistance. Aemee was under the impression that we had already started; after I assured her that this was not the case she consented to join. A few days later two third year students, Sarah and Maria, also volunteered to work with me. Originally, I had wanted six to eight story group members however out

of necessity I became content with three. During the three weeks that I had no responses I opened my invitation to one of my Site-Based Bachelor of Education classes and received positive responses from approximately six teachers. In the end this dissolved into one – Kate. A member of the education staff with skills in public relations volunteered her assistance allowing me to obtain another five participants. However, once again this turned into only one student who was willing to volunteer their time. The reasons given by people for not being able to participate in my research included time, university workloads and work and family commitments. I feel that it was worth learning that other people did not necessarily share my enthusiasm for the story group project. Having lived with the project so long, I was convinced of its importance. It was a humbling experience for me to find that others did not see it the same way. However, by this stage I was used to gleaning all things positive from seemingly negative results. In the end I was fortunate to enlist four story group members and three storytellers. In effect, I learned that a research proposal, no matter how neat and logical, is only a hypothetical plan. And I feel this is especially the case when you are working with real people.

From the beginning of my honours year I knew that I did not want to simply develop a theory that nobody would ever read or hear about again; instead, I wanted to work with *real* people and to give something of myself. An assertion by van Manen (1990, p. 7) captures a sense of what I *did not* want to produce:

Much of educational research tends to pulverise life into minute abstracted fragments and particles that are of little use to practitioners.

When I arrived at my final interest area of storytelling as a means of enhancing teacher personal-professional development, I came up with the idea of a story group. I envisaged such a group meeting together as a network of teachers who had stories to share. My purpose in establishing such a group was to answer the question of: 'How do teachers continue to develop their personal and professional knowledge about teaching through story sharing?' The literature suggested that teachers learn through creating narratives about what they do and by learning from each other in a collaborative environment. To discover whether or not such a proposition was plausible, I decided to run a series of four writing workshops where the volunteer participants would meet for two hours each week. I planned to take the participating teachers through a series of narrative processes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling as a learning tool. The process of story sharing would play a major role in each of the four writing workshops, both formally and incidentally. I hoped that the participating teachers would share themselves and their experiences in ways that could unite them as a group of professionals interested in learning together. The narrative process of story writing would follow in workshop two, allowing the participants to naturally build on from their time of oral story sharing. The processes of reflection and critiquing, aided by the use of a critique form, would follow in the final two workshops. I hoped that these two processes would give

the participating teachers an opportunity to discover the “deeper” meanings and issues relevant to themselves and their teaching. I also hoped that these two processes would encourage the participating teachers to consider the value of story sharing as a means of developing personal and professional self-efficacy and confidence.

The storytellers were participants who offered to be a part of the research process, however, due to other commitments were unable to attend the writing workshops. Hence, unlike their story group counterparts they were to play a minor role in the research process. Furthermore, their stories would not be taped. Instead, they would contribute a story in written form that I would later share with the story group participants. Their stories were to detail a successful teaching experience they had had. They could follow any theme they wished and the story could be as short or as long as they liked; I simply asked that they follow the basic structure of a narrative. My storytellers consisted of a female first year student, a female fourth year student and a female teacher-lecturer. Each of their stories was read aloud in the story group workshops and time for reflection was given. I saw the storytellers to be an important part of my research, as the bank of success stories could be built up without them actually having to attend the workshops. Initially, it was a way of allowing interested parties who could not afford the time to meet on a regular basis to contribute. Having them read aloud in the workshops allowed the story group members to hear the stories of other teachers and to identify with different storied

experiences. That is, it allowed them to interact and connect with the meanings contained within each of the stories – stories invited stories. It was also a way of opening up the world of stories and possibilities for reflection and change.

Before I started the workshops, I told myself that I would go in each week with a plan, although not to necessarily use it. I wanted the story group to evolve in its own way and saw it as my role to follow the natural leads that arose. I knew that ultimately it was my group and my research, however, I wanted it to be just as much the participating teachers group and *their* research – personal research about themselves. Liking structure, this was a scary prospect at first although once the workshops got under way I found it quite natural – something I wanted to do – and even quite liberating. In this way, we all had the opportunity to have ownership of the processes. It was also an effective way of letting the story group members run the sessions themselves. Yes, I had certain tasks that I wanted completed each week, however, how they were achieved was largely up to them.

The workshop outlines below detail the processes undertaken each week as well as the tasks achieved.

Workshop # 1: Introduction to 'The call of stories' (Coles, 1989)

I discussed with the participants the purpose of my work, as well as my intended benefits for them. My purpose involved evaluating the effectiveness of a story group that involved narrative processes and success storytelling. My proposed benefits included growing personally and professionally, meeting with and learning from fellow teachers of all ages and backgrounds and developing skills of reflection and critiquing. I acknowledged the fact that I would be adopting and moving between the three roles of researcher, facilitator and participant. I also stated that as a narrative researcher, I would negotiate with them what was to be written about the group and its processes. I spoke of my desire for the group to be both flexible and informal and something that they could play a major part in. That is, I wanted it to be their group as much as mine.

I interviewed the teachers to ascertain what they hoped to gain both personally and professionally through participating in the story group workshops. This part of the workshop was open-ended and each of the participants could contribute verbally at any time. The components of a good story were discussed and a variety of success stories shared. Storyteller one, a female student in fourth year wrote a story called "Jacinta Pinta" (Appendix Six). It was about a teacher who addressed the needs of a young girl whose mother was putting her down about her reading ability. I used it to illustrate success in written form. The second story was one that I had written called "Plasticine Pyramids" (Refer to p. 6).

This was used to illustrate the importance of 'context' in storytelling and writing. The third story was another of my stories called "B. B. Bones" (Refer to p. 7). I used this particular story to illustrate the development of my definition of 'success'. That is, at the time of the incident I thought it to be a successful experience, however, looking back at it now I realise that it was anything but. Firstly, we effectively "used" the class of year ones; we never planned to take them on the bus trip looking for skeletons. Secondly, if we had been teaching in a school environment we would not have been able to carry out the project to the extent that we did due to lack of teacher resources and time. Finally, it was really a case of us trying to obtain the best results that we could for the tutorial; the children were not at the heart of what we were doing, we were. I also suggested that this does not mean that the story is no longer valid or significant, it just means that my beliefs about teaching and learning have changed. I was also able to use this story to show that writing is an effective means of tracing your development as a teacher.

During the next part of the workshop the participants shared stories from their own teaching experiences with the rest of the story group. The participants followed the theme of "Titanics" and "Full Monty's". Titanics were classroom experiences that turned out to be total disasters and Full Monty's were "sinkers" turned successes. I saw the sharing of "Titanics" to be a way of contrasting unsuccessful teaching experiences with successful teaching experiences. The participants then engaged in the writing of basic outlines for a story they thought

they might like to develop further in Workshop Two following the theme of: “A Problem Solved”.

Workshop # 2:

The participants reviewed and shared draft one of their stories. Sarah, Aemee and Maria decided to stick to the theme of “A Problem Solved” while Kate wrote about an outright success where lots of things could have gone wrong but did not. As each of the teachers shared their drafts the other participants critiqued their work using a critique form I had developed (Appendix One). I decided to develop and make use of a critique form so that I could direct and follow the participants’ thinking about the shared success stories. I also saw it as a way of encouraging the participants to focus critically, although not in ways advocated by Goodson (1995) and Tripp (1993), on the meanings of the stories as well as their links to teacher personal and professional development. Such a form sits uneasily with the natural discourse and personal-professional way of learning of teachers I advocated earlier, however, due to a very limited timeframe I saw it to be an efficient and effective means of collecting as much data about the stories as possible. It also ensured that each of the participants received a response to their stories. The main aim of having each teacher engage in the process of critiquing was to defamiliarise the story, to make it strange to them. This would allow them to look at their experiences quite differently for purposes of reflection about themselves as people and as professionals. I based

my critique form, in part, on Frigga Haug's Memory-worksheet (cited in Schratz & Walker, 1995, p. 46) and Kamler's questions for readings texts (1997/98, p. 15). Kamler's questions in particular served to focus the participants on the "dominant discourses visible" allowing them to "imagine alternatives" (1997/98, p. 16). The critique form looked at such things as blind spots in the story, how the success was developed and what was powerful about the writing. I explained to the participants that by reading the critique forms that their peers had filled out about them and their stories they would have the opportunity to gain new ways of looking at their text.

The participants made the decision to revise the process of story critiquing the following week as they did not feel that they had had enough time to reflect on each of the stories. They also had difficulty concentrating on the oral story as they wrote.

Workshop # 3:

Each of the participants re-read their drafts to the group, and the process of critiquing was repeated. Between workshops two and three, Sarah had written a second draft and Kate had finished her final draft. Three of the four participants found the critique form difficult to understand and all of them wanted me to decode the meaning of each 'box' for them again. In hindsight, I feel that I tried to fit too much information into the form. I also feel that I rushed its

implementation. However, the data obtained from the critique forms was useful to this group of teachers, as it allowed them to find out new things about themselves as both people and professionals. The data also proved to be very affirming and encouraging to these teachers' self-efficacy and confidence and commitment to primary school teaching.

After the critiquing session, the participants answered two questions on the reverse of one of their critique forms about what each of the stories had in common and what they felt they had learned about themselves both personally and professionally. The purpose of this was to review the story themes and the teachers' development and growth in written form. Furthermore, I hoped that the data would complement the interview data and transcripts. Each of the participants then received copies of the critique forms relating to their stories and took notes on what they thought they could incorporate into their final drafts. They also adopted a title for their story given to them by one of their fellow participants. The process of titling is a way of reflecting back what is important to you as a reader-listener.

At the end of the workshop I read two other successes written by Storytellers two and three. Storyteller two (Appendix Seven) wrote about the rewards of giving children individual attention and Storyteller three (Appendix Eight) wrote about improvements in student learning and motivation after changing her approach to teaching reading comprehension. Each story was read aloud by me

so that the story group members could hear about other teachers' experience with success. Following this, I interviewed Kate, as she was not going to be at the workshop the following week.

Workshop # 4:

The participants shared their final drafts and then I interviewed them as a group. I asked the same questions that I had asked Kate, plus two others that dealt with running a similar program at the pre-service and graduate levels, and what they thought were the best things that they had got out of attending the workshops. Riessman (1993, p. 55) suggests that: "Interviews are conversations in which both participants – teller and listener/questioner – develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both". I tried to adopt such interviewing practices by allowing the other participants and myself to comment on and ask questions of what was said by the interviewee. In this way, I hoped to achieve as much meaning as possible and in 'participatory' and 'collective' ways. This type of interviewing practice is supported by Laslett and Rapoport (cited in Oakley, 1981, p. 44) who stress the importance of "non-hierarchical relationships" and interviews that "generate a collaborative approach" engaging "both the interviewer and respondent in a joint enterprise".

At the end of the workshop we all went for coffee. This allowed me to thank them for their time and support. It was a very informal affair and the sharing of stories was never far away!

After each of the workshops I would immediately write up my thoughts on what had taken place as well as what had been said. The following morning I would transcribe, by hand, the dialogue from each of the workshops. I would then type up my thoughts and transcripts on the computer, adding new thoughts in brackets as I went. I found that by doing the transcribing myself I was able to follow the processes and group dynamics week by week. It also allowed me to signpost and comment, using brackets, on themes and issues that consistently arose in the speech each week. In this way, I could systematically follow the progress of my work and findings. I was originally going to summarise what the participants and myself talked about, however, in the end I saw it as more beneficial to get what was said word-for-word so that meaning was not altered or replaced.

According to Riessman (1993, p. 56) the processes of taping and transcribing “are absolutely essential to narrative analysis”. And although it is a “lengthy” process most often involving careful “selection and reduction” it is a necessary process if accurate meaning is to be achieved (Riessman, 1993, p. 56). She suggests that researchers transcribe roughly to begin with and then condense this into “selected portions” for a more “detailed analysis”. That is why I decided to

write up my initial thoughts and impressions immediately after each workshop, as it allowed me to capture the most significant themes and events in written form. The following day I would then transcribe in full from the tapes, leaving out those parts that were irrelevant and highlighting the sections that I could use profitably. Millett (cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 11) asserts that it is important to make every effort to try and display the “different voices” of the participants. That is, to render their experiences in ways that they themselves may have told them. And that is what I have tried to achieve – a story that captures each participant’s personality and “voice” in meaningful written form.

At the conclusion of the workshops I extended an invitation to the story group members to play a part in the editing process. Only Aemee seemed interested and to the extent that she would read one of my final drafts. Sarah stated – and the others agreed - that she believed that I would be able to make good sense of what had transpired. I wanted to offer this role to the participants so that once again they had an opportunity to own and be responsible for the various research processes – after all I was going to be writing about them and their work. I also hoped that this would serve to further validate my work, making it more authentic, as well as accessible to teachers interested in learning through reflecting on stories. As well as this, I offered to make copies of the success stories so that they could have a record of the stories we told and shared. I also saw it to be a memory of the story group and its processes in written form. Furthermore, I hoped that the stories would inspire them “in moments of

discouragement” (Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995, p. xvii) and instill habits of meaningful and purposeful reflection upon themselves and their practice.

* * *

Data Analysis:

Validated chat and other such processes...

I was able to collect a variety of data ranging from story outlines, to answers, to interview questions. However, I have decided to concentrate on what I think is the most interesting and pertinent data. I am also aware of telling too much with too little detail. I would rather give a holistic picture of a few items than a series of little “surface” pictures that do not explore meaning from all angles and for all parties concerned.

Story sharing is becoming accepted as a “legitimate mode of professional development” for teachers (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xii). The power of story sharing rests with its ability to interact and connect with its listeners and readers. Such power allows storytellers and story listeners to reflect upon and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practices (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xvi). Furthermore, this line of inquiry can lead to personal-professional development and insight that is both meaningful and purposeful to teachers (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xvi). Throughout my study I have emphasised both the process and the product of narrative, as I believe both are crucial in understanding teacher practice and development. As such, I have explored and chosen to discuss a number of key issues arising from the data *and* the research process. Firstly, the interview responses from workshops one and four.

Secondly, the relationship between the first and final draft and how the process of critical discussion, in part, did or did not contribute to any changes made to the stories. Thirdly, the similarities and differences between the teachers' stories. Fourthly, I explored the themes of agency, emotion, affirmation and critical reflection. And finally, I considered the extent to which the teachers changed personally and/or professionally as a result of taking part in the writing workshops.

I have organised my data and interpretations in a way that serves to maintain the coherence of individual participants' stories. I hope to allow each narrator to represent themselves to some degree in my portrayal of them and their work. In this way, I hope that they too will have contributed to the "stories" that arose out of the story group workshops. Hence, I am not the only author of this paper. I have four co-authors of whom I am the chief author and editor. With these two duties comes responsibility – responsibility to write a meaningful and coherent piece of work that incorporates my participants' voices. The notion of voice in stories is an important part of ethics in narrative research. As McEwan (1995, p. 91) once asked, "whose voice will be honored – teachers or researchers or both?" McEwan (1995, p. 91), in part, answered his own question when he quoted Hargreaves (1990) who said: "Overall the important thing seems to me that we do not merely present teachers' voices, but that we represent them critically and contextually." Hence, I hope to present my participants' voices in

ways that are both reflective and accessible. As well as this, I hope to share them in a way that captures the contexts in which they came.

My research questions revisited...

Firstly, 'How do teachers continue to develop their personal and professional knowledge about teaching through story sharing?' Does storytelling have to involve an element of critique to be of any professional value to teachers? Do teachers have to reflect to grow or does it just happen? Secondly, can my proposition that, 'Teachers learn through creating stories about what they do and through sharing these in collaborative settings' be substantiated through the evidence below? And finally, is it likely that these teachers will continue to learn, continue to sustain their commitment to primary school teaching and continue to enhance their personal-professional development and self-efficacy through reflective processes? That is, will they change as a result of their participation in the story group? These are substantial questions and ones that need to be addressed in order to establish whether or not the above narrative processes enhance teacher personal-professional development.

What the teachers hoped to gain...

I opened the first session to the participants with a general question of what they hoped to gain through participating in the above processes and then moved

quietly into the background. I did not mind that at times they went “off track” as they usually came back to the question, if in a roundabout fashion. I also believe that the other comments they made during the interview served to get to the heart of what they wanted to say. Below is a summary of the participants’ responses, in which the key themes of relationships, learning and affirmation are clearly apparent:

Kate stated that she was new in town and wanting to establish contact with peers. She also saw it as an important basis for friendship and an opportunity to glean what she could as a teacher from other people. Aemee also asserted her hope and belief that “no matter what stage they’re (other teachers) at you’re going to get things you haven’t thought about, things that reinforce what you have thought about.” Maria expressed her desire to hear other teachers’ stories and to have the chance to “relate” to what is said through them. Sarah further built on from this idea of relating when she voiced her need to be “validated.” This comment also supported Aemee’s notion of reinforcing your own thoughts through listening to others. Aemee made a point of the importance of collaborative work, of it being “so important.” She went on to say that a good teacher is one who is willing to share their ideas. Both Sarah and Maria made connections to café talk after teaching practices. They likened the story group to such meetings suggesting that it was “just a more formalised way of doing it”. Such thinking can be linked to the ‘validated chat’ idea: talk spoken and valued by teachers – a type of talk with an anti-technical focus. Belenky, Clinchy,

Goldberger and Tarule (1986) in their text *Women's Ways of Knowing*, stress women's preference for learning through *connecting* with others. Belenky et al. (1986) suggest that such "connected knowing" is the kind of knowledge and learning that women value, that is, knowing that is grounded in peoples' lives and experiences.

The stories...

All of the story group members' stories involve an element of risk and the narrators – the teachers – are seen to demonstrate courage. However, this is where the similarities end. Kate's story in particular is set apart from the rest of the stories in that no actual complications arose. The other three stories all contained problems that needed to be solved before the success could come. The reflective processes of teaching, illustrated in the stories, can also be compared: 'teaching as action' and 'teaching as intellectual work' (Giroux, 1988). Kate's story illustrates the concept of 'teaching as action'. At the other end of the continuum is Sarah whose perseverance in the face of an exploitative work situation allowed her to deepen her knowledge about teaching and learning. Both Maria and Aemee demonstrated aspects of each, with Maria tending towards 'teaching as action' and Aemee operating closer to 'teaching as intellectual work'. With the knowledge of these comparisons, I would like to discuss each story in turn exploring the extent to which changes were made between the first and final drafts. Data contained within the critique forms have

served to inform my findings. At the conclusion of my thesis I will reflect upon the processes of story sharing and reflecting, as well as, my own experience of the research process.

Kate's Story: "The Wedding" (Appendix Two)

Kate's story details a big event where all sorts of things could have gone wrong but did not. In her initial draft, Kate walks her audience through the background information in great detail. The first part of her initial draft is written in the form of a list where everything from the time frame, to clothing and enthusiasm are mentioned. She then jumps into the beginning of the big celebration in narrative form, although with parts of it still written as a list. Within this draft, Kate captures her thoughts and concerns about the big day beautifully with lines like, "I am nervous, will the bride fit into my old dress?" and "I think we are ready to go." Some of the other teachers mentioned the fact that the introductory list was hard to follow and probably not necessary for her listeners to hear. Kate explained that she did it for own benefit so that she could get the details of the event clear in her mind. As well as this, the participants mentioned how they had liked how she had included her worries and concerns within the story.

In Kate's second and final version the list is dropped and her writing follows more closely the structure of a narrative. It is also a lot more personable and audience friendly. However, it is much the same story and contains the same

content and narrator emotions. I think this was partly the case because Kate was not going to be around for the fourth workshop and as a result of this she brought her final piece to our third one. When I asked her if she wanted to re-read her critique forms to let me know what she would have changed if time had permitted, she declined, saying that she would not have changed anything anyway. I am unsure of what to read into this, except to say that she did not care to take into consideration the reflections of others. Possibly, it shows her unwillingness to change and/or confidence in her own ability as a teacher-writer. Her experience as a teacher could also be a factor. In comparison, the other participants were 'novices' who were much more conscious of learning their craft. I found it a little disheartening, as I had hoped that the comments of others would inform the teachers' final efforts, however, it illustrates the point that not all teachers see the need for reflection as a precursor to change. Furthermore, it provides a chance to contrast definitions of "success". In many ways, Kate's story is like my "B. B. Bones" story – a big production that is a "success" although the "success" focuses on the teacher more than on the learners. Interestingly however, the other teachers did not have any problems or concerns with the story. I do not know whether this was because they were all pre-service teachers and were simply blinded by the excitement and bravado of her story and actions or because there actually was not anything that needed changing. Maybe it was "perfect" and Kate did get it right the first time around.

In reflection, I believe there existed within the group an element of role playing, where Kate was the “mum” – a teacher who had been “out there” for years – and the other three were her babies who looked up to her for inspiration and magical teacher knowledge. To some degree, I experienced such role playing myself; the fact that I had been out there in the real world of teaching made me somehow different and wiser as I had insight into, and a real experience of, the “inside story”. And there was not anything wrong with this – Kate was able to make the most of her new found role as mentor and model and it was an encouragement to both the participants and myself. Furthermore, I think that was what was so powerful about Kate’s writing – it let the other participants in on a few secrets about the possibilities of teaching and learning. This was an added benefit that came out of the group; it allowed the teachers to relate to others with like concerns and receive the validation that they were after.

Maria’s Story: “*Even the Boys Danced*” (Appendix Three)

Maria’s story is a neat little account of overcoming negativity and resistance to a dance program. It starts off with her love for dancing and excitement at being able to teach it to a class of Year Sevens. In her first account, Maria takes her listeners through the problem of having to get a group of Year Seven boys enthused about dancing. All of the necessary details are included and the appropriate background information supplied. Maria’s fellow participants defined her success as her ability to relate to and motivate non-enthusiasts. Two

of them, however, commented on the fact that her ending was “a bit flat” and that they were left wanting to know what “Steven’s” response was in the end. Maria rectified these concerns in her final piece adding more of her personal thoughts and feelings throughout the story as well as rounding it off with a thoughtful and responsive conclusion. Maria’s story can be seen to be a story about gender stereotyping. Such broader social issues were not generated out of any of the story group discussions, however it is worth noting that such conversations could have been worthwhile. Goodson (1992) suggests that we need to ‘ground’ our stories in appropriate theoretical and social contexts. That is, we should critically reflect upon the contexts, in which the stories reside and relate to them significant social issues such as justice and equality.

Aemee’s Story: “*Second Time Chances*” (Appendix Four)

Aemee’s first draft was given orally as she was in the middle of a two week teaching practice. As such I do not have a written first version to compare with her last, however, I did record her account on tape. Aemee’s story begins with an unconventional introduction into her very first lesson. It also explores her courage to change a plan that did not quite work. Each of the other teachers enjoyed her story, especially her means of capturing her students’ attention first up. From reading the critique forms written about her I feel that the participants enjoyed her beginning – “engaging initially” and “confident beginning” – but had some concerns about the end of her story. Such comments are well

supported by the fact that she did not finish her story in her initial oral account. Each of the participants noted Aemee's care for her students and her desire to always make learning interesting and motivating. They also felt that by being able to run through her lesson a second time enabled her to make an even bigger success of her *first* attempt. Aemee positioned her audience beautifully by including background information from her earliest years. This allowed her listeners to gain an insight into Aemee as a person and the "why?" behind her motives. Throughout her story Aemee can be seen to almost carry her audience with her, hence the momentum of the account never slowed and meaning was always kept. The participants learned a lot through Aemee's story as it showed that by being a "braveheart – facer of the foe" you are able to accomplish almost anything – including a grand response from your students. Furthermore, they learned that negative experiences can be re-framed as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Sarah's Story: "*Work, Work, Aargh : Think, Think, Ah Ha*" (Appendix Five)

Sarah's story was the one that changed the most over the four workshops, basically because she was an over-achiever who would not settle for anything but her best. Her story was also the longest and the most involved. However, as mentioned earlier, her story clearly showed the meaning of 'teaching as intellectual work' (Giroux, 1988). Sarah's story took place over five weeks –

five long weeks of constant difficulties. It was a story of inspiration, not unlike Aemee's, and an illustration of where hard, hard work can get you. Sarah's first draft was dramatically different to her last and I believe the other story group members' comments and encouragement served to make it an excellent final piece of writing. Sarah's use of language and strong imagery made a long story seem "just right." Her story was very contextualised and all of the relevant information was included. I think the best thing about Sarah's story was the fact that by the end of the writing process, *Sarah* believed in her story, and her ability to convey success meaningfully. Change in Sarah's story also occurred at a deeper level where she came to value success in a different way, that is, there was a shift in what was important to her – in what she valued. Sarah herself captured this sensitively when she said:

I think that thinking about that series of events as a success has given me more of a...helped me to value perseverance more....Whereas before I would have thought that getting it right the first time was more important.

Hence, it could be said that by going through the process of critical reflection one is able to see and know things from a different perspective and this can serve to inform future classroom practice. Sarah also stated that she was "inclined to hide the 'yucky bits' in (her) storytelling" and that her experiences would not be "successful" if she put in the "true stuff". However, by the end of

the workshops Sarah felt that she could be more honest. Could it be said then, that one is able to move to greater honesty as trust develops? For this group of teachers I think it could, because as I observed and reflected upon each of the workshops I noted significant changes in the group's dynamics and individual members' ways of relating to one another. And because the participants had an opportunity to relate to one another in honest and sincere ways they did, serving to encourage and build their sense of teacher self-efficacy.

The teachers...

From the first workshop onwards, Kate was confident. She was sure of who she was and where she was going; or at least she gave the impression that she was and I am sure that the other participants sensed this. Aemee did not say much during the first two workshops, however, this changed over time and when she did speak what she was said was said with conviction. Sarah and Maria both had doubts about their abilities as teachers as well as the extent to which they could share successes. In the beginning Sarah was absolutely adamant that she had no successes whatsoever to contribute to the group. As the weeks went by however, in part through the meaningful and sensitive comments of others, both Sarah and Maria grew in confidence. This was evident in the final drafts of each of their stories. And I really do feel that this was a part of the uniqueness of this group, in that it served so many more purposes than just learning through storytelling. Perhaps it could be said that the learner is broader than just 'improving practice',

that is, he or she is a person as well as a professional. And as a person, he or she may have significant needs other than those directly related to becoming a better educator. In this particular case, it involved the learner learning to value different qualities and to see “success” in a different light. Goodson (cited in Goodson & Walker, 1991, p. 138) stresses the importance of the personal in understanding teaching when he states:

...to understand teacher development and curriculum development...
we need to know a great deal more about teachers’ priorities. We need
in short to know more about teachers’ lives.

Hence, it is crucial that we reflect upon the personal when attempting to understand teaching and learning practices, as without it we are only gaining part of the picture and indeed part of the person.

One could say that such a story group lacks the critical edge necessary to allow its participants to advance as both people and professionals, however, over time I think the opposite would be true. As friendships are formed, foundations for trust and respect can be established and with such qualities can come the ability to contribute in both positive and constructive ways. Of course such formations of friendship and trust are voluntary, however, in my experience people do not usually decline as it places them in positions where they can “win” on a number of different levels. Yes, they will probably hear things about themselves and their practice that they would rather not hear, however, it can give them the

courage to actively seek ways of enhancing their personal-professional practice. All four members, and especially as time went on, were willing to give positive and constructive feedback to their peers as well as receive it themselves. Sarah's experience is an excellent example of this, serving to show what can result when the facades are broken down and individuals can respond in ways that show care and respect for the other. Sarah's story also highlights the need to establish a 'high-trust' environment, as without it, it is unlikely that individuals will share in deep and meaningful ways about themselves and their practice.

Agency and emotion in teaching...

Agency can be described as having a sense of power and control over your teaching. It is the sense of knowing that comes with experiencing a variety of meaningful successes in your teaching, and it is most often built up over time. Various levels of teacher agency can be seen to be evident in the story group members' stories and some of the key related points and issues are explored below.

Each of the four story group members took credit for their successes but to different extents. Kate read her story in a way that highlighted her success, and from start to finish we never thought that it was anything but a success. Her enthusiasm for her story bubbled over into her audience, and we could not help but latch onto her keen sense of enjoyment for all things creative. Kate's reading

of her story was very powerful, serving to bring it home with great gusto and momentum. The other participants just *loved* her story and all commented on how it had inspired them to think “big.” At the other end of the continuum was Sarah, who thought her story would never come across as a success. She stated that *she* believed in it, but never thought that she could “convince” everyone else to believe in it. Any form of encouragement that came her way over the time-frame of the four workshops Sarah would deny outright or at least attempt to attribute to someone or something else. Her fellow participants picked up on this early and Maria who was in the same year as her at university, would not accept her attempts of having her successes lie with others. Contributing to this, I feel, was the self-doubting that comes with “good” teaching. Every one of these teachers – and I know I do – to some degree doubted their capabilities as professionals and as people. And I am sure that it was this element of self-doubt that contributed to the development of their ‘professional conscience’. It also contributed to their desire to consistently reflect and learn. This belief is supported by Aemee’s comment thus:

I feel we’ll all get something out of it really, really valuable because you can’t reflect enough, you can’t learn enough and you can’t be motivated enough to be a teacher.

From the beginning, Aemee was able to take credit for her success although I am sure that the degree to which she did was enhanced as she worked at

polishing her final piece. Her fellow participants really enjoyed listening to her two “runs” of the social studies lesson and were encouraged by her willingness to stop the class when all started to go wrong. The other participants also noted the confidence she had in herself and her teaching abilities. I sensed early on that Aemee found it hard that she had not had as much teaching experience as the other members had had and so it was great that she was able to share such a success with them. Maria credited her success to herself although not in a confident manner. She did however, enjoy giving credit to others.

A further theme I investigated was the extent to which the success “just happened” as opposed to it being conscious problem solving involving decision-making and planned action. Kate’s story, “The Wedding”, involved decision-making and planning, however, it did not involve any real problem solving, at least not in the narrated version. Hence, it could be said that it “just happened” but not without prior thought and preparation. In essence, Kate’s story was a celebration of making things happen, of making the right decisions at the right times. In this way, her sense of agency was a constant throughout her story.

Louden and Wallace’s book, *Quality in the classroom: Learning about teaching through case studies* (1996, p. xi) advocates the need for teachers to *plan* for improvement. They argue that teachers need to be: “more reflective, more collaborative and more deliberate in their plans for improvement of their teaching and learning activities.” That is, teachers need to stop and consider the

reasons behind their practices and plan for learning and improvement and not just expect it to happen. And as the title of their book suggests, such planning and deliberation will result in *quality* teaching and learning.

Maria's story, "Even the Boys Danced", involved all three processes although the first two to a greater extent. Yes, she solved the problem of getting the boys to dance and this involved some careful decision-making, however, it was not as much planned, as it was a success that just happened. Aemee's story, "Second Time Chances", incorporated all three elements and to the same extent. The problem before her not only required problem solving and planning, but also much decision-making. In this way, her success did not just "happen" rather it was through perseverance and careful thought about the situation.

Both Maria and Aemee's stories portrayed them as teachers who were becoming aware of their own capacities. In each of their respective stories, Maria and Aemee could have given up and deemed their situations "too hard", but instead, they chose to have-a-go at making a positive difference in their teaching. As well as this, each of them displayed courage, a trait that I believe is closely linked to agency, as making advances in your teaching most often means taking thoughtful and courageous risks.

Out of the four participants, Sarah's story about the mathematical Think Boards involved the three processes to the greatest extent. It also involved a lot of

determined work! Sarah's success involved conscious problem solving, week after week, and with the help of her peer Jane she was able to decide how to make it "happen" in the most effective ways. And it was through her actions that she was able to deliberately evaluate her progress each week. In essence, it was Sarah's developing sense of agency that allowed her to become more confident and effective in her teaching. As the weeks passed by, she turned near impossible demands on herself and her time into opportunities for change and improvement. I believe, that in part, Sarah was made aware of her effective decision-making skills and heightened sense of control over her teaching through the process of story sharing and what the other story group members were able to reflect back to her. Such peer reflections can be very powerful and in Sarah's case it allowed her to view her storied experience as a "success" – a success worth sharing and learning from!

Emotion in teaching (Noddings, 1996) can be expressed in the form of narratives. Noddings (1996) argues that affect has been forgotten in schools serving to reduce the engagement and learning of students and teachers. She goes on to say that stories can fill this lack of affect and emotion in teaching as they have the power to improve human interactions. Through storytelling, individuals are able to share with their audience the things that they value, as well as their corresponding thoughts and feelings. Stories are unique in that they also convey, when one reads between the lines, what the author does not want you to hear. It is through their silences that the listeners are able to gain an

insight into what the actor does and does not value and care about. As such, the audience is able to attain a sense of who they are and what they believe. Evident in each of the stories told by the story group members were emotions that were needed by them to sustain their commitment to teaching. That is, as human beings they had certain characteristics that helped to support their role as teachers. The emotions and traits that were common in each of the participants' stories – qualities that can almost be described as 'imperatives for reflective practice' – included:

- It is worth persevering.
- It pays to reexamine routines and habits.
- Taking a thoughtful risk pays off in the end.
- Try to see things from the students' point of view.
- It is worth caring.
- Delight in children's participation and learning.
- Taking the time to reflect is worth it.
- An element of self-doubt is helpful in steering you toward success.
- A working relationship with each of your students is vital for real learning.
- Tapping into the teacher-as-person is important in teaching.

Each of these involve teacher-thinking to a lesser or greater degree, however, such qualities do not just creep naturally into the classroom, each one of them

requires thought and deliberate action. I wonder though, would each of the teachers present in the story group necessarily have recognised that that is what they do? Now that they have discussed each of these “good” teacher attributes will they transpose them into their classrooms in a more conscious way? I think that by being aware of what is required to reap successful results, teachers are one step closer to achieving “greatness” in their teaching, not in the sense of self-promotion but rather, “Look what I can achieve for and with my students through careful thought and reflection”.

Is there a need for affirmation amongst teachers?

Do teachers such as those in my story group need to be affirmed in order to feel valuable and indeed valid as teachers? Is it important that they not only know and experience success for themselves but that their *peers* tell them that they are successful? Through my experience with this story group I can say that each of the teachers liked to receive positive feedback about their work. Whether it was a “Well done” or a reaffirming “Yeah” each one of them liked to gain insight into their positive attributes. And I think it is a basic human need – to feel accepted and liked by your peers. It was not that they did not know it for themselves deep down, rather it was a chance for them to have it reinforced and in the company of others. When friendships like the ones I described earlier are formed, giving and receiving positive feedback seems a natural part of the relationship – “You build me up and I will think of something nice to say about

you.” Such expressions of support and encouragement were exchanged consistently throughout the four workshops and funnily enough it was those that needed to receive it the most that gave it the most.

Holly (1989) believes that the act of collaboration has the capacity to open up new perspectives. Holly (1989, p. 141) asserts that teachers who are “present-oriented, conservative” and “conforming” are merely engaging in what she calls “adaptive behaviour”. That is, when teachers are placed in full-time teaching positions they are immediately expected to adopt a series of responsibilities that display their capacity to teach. And instead of admitting that they are experiencing difficulties teachers will concentrate on the present in ‘conservative’ and ‘conforming’ ways that do not damage their “already shaky self-esteem”. Hence, as opposed to operating within difficult and often lonely environments Holly (1989, p. 141) suggests that teachers place themselves in “collegial” environments. In this way, teachers are able to “draw on the experiences and perceptual worlds of others” and be made aware of perspectives that differ from theirs.

People could suggest that such sharing – and through story form – is simply ‘conservative’. That is to say that it is merely a way of affirming the way we already see ourselves. Hogan (1996) raises doubts about the capacity of teacher talk to generate change. She sees it as a process of “self-affirmation” – a way of teachers justifying their decisions and practice. She goes on to say that such

storytelling is most often “presented uncritically” and in terms that can result in “conservatism and even smug self-congratulation rather than improved practice” (1996, p. 14). Such a notion could be taken further and one could go so far as to say that it closes off any opportunities for challenges. And if teachers are not open to challenges then how can they be expected to grow and develop?

I do not agree that story sharing is simply a normative process that closes the door to challenges and change and instead paves the way for sessions of “show and tell.” Used thoughtfully, it can be a means of discovering what teachers *really* believe about teaching and learning and how they *really* act in the classroom. Such discovery can alert teachers to things that they may never have thought about or seen in themselves. This first step to change, can in turn, lead to opportunities for growth and development. This dual purpose of affirmation and self-other discovery is unique to storytelling and one that needs to be acknowledged and taken advantage of. If teachers themselves do not tap into such productive and beneficial processes then who will? If we have such a natural and teacher-friendly process out there, then why not use it? According to Bruner (1990) storytelling is a part of the psychology of humans, a way of making meaning of the world and their place in it. Bruner (1990) also states that the very nature of narrative allows humans to create social meaning in ways that are relevant and meaningful.

There are a number of different barriers to teachers’ collaboration and story sharing. Such barriers include the isolating nature of teachers’ work, and the

intensification and pressure of time (Woods, Jeffrey, Troman & Boyle, 1997). Lortie (1975) was one of the first people to address the issue of teacher isolation in his well known image of the “egg crate school” – a school where teachers existed and operated in their own separate worlds, apart from their colleagues and without the chance to relate to one another. Nias (1989) later addressed the same topic suggesting that teachers who operate in isolating ways take themselves away from opportunities to share and reflect collectively. The other major barrier to teacher collaboration and storysharing is the factor of time. On top of having to care and plan for their class, teachers have to attend to administrative and playground duties – before, during and after school – attend school meetings and engage in professional development *and* make sense of new policies and curriculum frameworks on a consistent basis. Such necessities do not leave much time for story sharing and collaboration in *real* ways. And if stories *are* shared it is often between individuals en route to somewhere else, as is the transient nature of the oral culture of teaching; the factor of time is also linked to this culture of teaching. One way of overcoming this is by engaging in the power and permanence of writing, a way of locating and using data in the longer term *and* in more considered ways.

Stories are an effective means of establishing trust. As Fullan (1997) notes, trusting relationships are the basis on which any positive educational change must be built. If no level of trust exists within a given group it makes it hard for people to give and receive critical feedback. And if people do not feel

comfortable in giving and receiving critical feedback then how can they be expected to reflect and change? An atmosphere of trust and respect needs to be established before critical perspectives can be introduced and from my experience with the story group it could be said that success stories are one such way of achieving a trusting environment. Furthermore, a relationship of trust can only be undermined if initially no positive feedback is given and received. If a foundation of positives forms the basis of the relationship then the receiver has something to fall back on when faced with critical feedback. I was not able to observe such processes in full operation, however, I was able to see the confidence of the members grow as they consistently gave and received positive feedback.

So, what things did the teachers find out about themselves both as professionals and as people?

Sarah...

Sarah changed with regard to how honest she was in her storytelling. In her own words,

I am inclined to hide the yucky bits in my storytelling – I didn't think that I would do that, but re-reading my story it is blatantly

obvious that I haven't told the whole truth about the experience! –
(I) changed that in my second draft.

As visited earlier, Sarah did not believe that she could convince others of her success and so as a result of this she neglected the “yucky” parts in her storytelling. Perhaps this reflects Sarah's deepening sense of what “success” is in teaching. It is interesting, however, that she *could* display such parts by the end of the workshops in both her story writing and storytelling. And I feel that the other participants noticed and appreciated this change also, serving to boost her confidence even more. Sarah also felt that by thinking about the series of events in her story she was able to value perseverance more. Sarah went on to say that had she not gone through such thinking processes she would have thought that it was more important to get things right the first time. Another thing Sarah learned as a professional, was the importance of valuing others – the colleagues you work with. Sarah suggested that this was not something that she normally valued but that it had helped her to share her ideas and to go through the process of reflection.

A further thing Sarah found out about herself was the need to talk to others – to “pick their brains” and ask them questions. Sarah also suggested that if a “validated chat” network did not exist when she started teaching full-time she would create her own. The other three participants whole-heartedly agreed. Sarah made an interesting comment relating to this issue of talk when she stated

that she thought that such a network already existed. To which I responded with an ironic, “Good Luck!”.

Maria...

Maria learned that she constantly changes her mind about the lessons she plans, and hardly ever follows to the letter what she originally sets out. Maria went on to say that such changes can be quite painful, and that they more often than not spring from doubts she has about her teaching ability. Maria also reaffirmed her belief that students need opportunities to express themselves. This belief is supported by the success contained within her story. Furthermore, Maria discovered that she likes to have just as much fun as her students. That is, classroom experiences need to be enjoyable for both her and her students.

A further thought of Maria's was that the time of the story group meetings, and the stage she was at within the course, was perfect for sustaining her commitment to teaching. She found the group to be “so positive” and exactly what she needed. Maria also believed that the story group meetings served as good reminders as to why she teaches (Woods, 1993, p. 3). Maria felt that the process of critiquing was a good idea as it allowed her to find out things about herself that she either did not know about or took for granted. She saw it as a way of gaining different points of view.

Like Sarah, Maria discovered that she would not be able to keep herself quiet when she went out teaching – she would need an outlet to make some “noise”, a means of resisting the culture of privatism (Nias, 1989). In her own words,

If I had this great lesson or a disaster of a lesson I’m not just going to be able to walk into the staff-room and not say anything – I have to like share stuff...I’d want to tell....to me that’d be important to have peers at school that I’d be able to talk to about my lessons, ideas and about students.

Maria went on to say that the processes of sharing, writing and critiquing have just “underlined” what she wants to do when she is out teaching. She also stated that she would not like to miss listening to other people’s stories and ideas as you can learn “so much from stories”.

Kate...

Kate believes,

that we are all on a journey and that at any time we can be moved, changed, challenged or jolted but that we will get through it and be a better, wiser, more prepared, open and/or flexible teacher for the experience.

Kate related this line of thinking to her own journey when she stated that she had been extended as a person and that through her participation in the workshops she had changed. She also saw her participation as a way of stopping herself from becoming “insular”. In this way, she could give to others and hear about other people’s lives and spheres of life. Kate also felt that the workshops “confirmed” what she already did naturally – sharing, reflecting and writing.

An interesting point that Kate arrived at was the fact that she had an opportunity to see the writing process through children’s eyes. That is, by having to get her thinking flowing, and writing several drafts after group conferences and critiquing, she was able to gain an insight into how children feel. For example, when we expect children’s creativity to “flow automatically” after they have just sat a test or come in from physical education. Kate saw this exercise as very useful – a way of identifying “what you’re putting on them.”

Aemee...

Aemee was able to discover that she appears very confident as a teacher and as a person. She also found out that in her writing it is obvious that she has always wanted to be a teacher – For example, Aemee remembers “marking” her brother’s work. Aemee was able to sum up her learning in three words – “A great deal!” I think this is what all of the teachers found – that you can never

find out too much about yourself and that through stories in particular you are able to unearth your beliefs and concerns as both people and as professionals.

Another point that Aemee brought up was that it is the “journey and not the destination that counts.” Aemee stated that this is what she learned about herself and others through the processes of storytelling and critiquing. Aemee went on to say that there is always room for improvement and adaptation – “you can always change things for the better.” Aemee was also able to discover that she has now learned the art of stopping the class when they are confused and to the point where she no longer needs to think about it, it is automatic for her. Aemee found this reaffirming to her professional journey and was pleased that she was making progress. A further thing Aemee learned was the fact that she enjoys critiquing people’s work – she likes encouraging people to keep going, to keep improving.

Aemee was also able to find out that by sharing your stories – “verbalising” – you are able to sort things out in your mind, as well as form a common ground for discussing things with other people. And by listening to other teachers’ stories Aemee feels that you are able to learn a lot that you can relate to your own experience. For example, by listening to Kate and Maria’s stories Aemee was able to identify the need for risk-taking in her teaching; that through taking risks you are able to reap a lot of meaningful benefits.

How the teachers made sense of their teaching through storytelling...

Kate believes that stories are a way of getting things down. Tripp (1993, p. 109) suggests that by getting things down in writing we are able to examine it “in a deeper and more objective way”, as opposed to avoiding such critiquing through “spontaneously” recalling “past thoughts or events within the usual flow of our daily lives”. Hogan (1998, p. 26) supports Tripp when she states that reflective writing allows teachers to develop professionally in ways that “‘just thinking’ or ‘thinking through talking’ rarely achieve”. Kate feels that teachers do not write down enough of what happens to them in the classroom on a day-to-day basis. She went on to say that the “richness” of what happens in every day is overshadowed by politics and that “the joy of actually teaching” is neglected and/or not appreciated. Kate feels that we should capture what we experience in writing so that we can give voices to the students in our care, and so that we can acknowledge to ourselves and to others that we *are* successful.

Maria confirmed the amount of “organisation and care” that goes into lesson preparations. She supported this by saying, “not just anybody can be teachers”. She feels that somebody who just walked off the street would be able to give the instructions but they would not be able to see which students were having difficulty and why. Such a comment points the way to teachers’ knowledge and what Smyth (1995) refers to as the “indigenous culture” of teaching. Teachers, believes Maria, are special kinds of people – people who have a unique knack of

translating their knowing into action. Such knowing is what Clandinin, Davies, Hogan and Kennard (1993) term 'personal practical knowledge'. A type of knowledge that allows teachers to talk about and reflect upon classroom practice in teacher-appropriate and meaningful ways (Clandinin, et al., 1993, p. 7).

Aemee suggested that storytelling is worthwhile as you are reflecting at the same time. Sarah believes that by listening to other people's stories, you are able to focus on the students and appreciate where they fit into the story and what it is they are doing while you are teaching. Sarah also commented on the "knowing" of teaching, describing it as a form of ESP. Such a description could be seen to devalue and mystify teachers' knowledge, however, in this particular context, I feel that it is valid as the majority of these teachers are still learning how to make use of it. *Although*, it could still be said that teachers are unable to take credit for it because of the fact that they cannot identify exactly what it is they have done to achieve their success.

The value of sharing, writing and critiquing...

The story group members felt that the process of sharing stories, writing and critiquing fell "so naturally into place" from the first workshop to the last. Maria suggested that even the critiquing was a natural step, as you wanted to know *why*, as well as reaffirm what you felt to be the case. Aemee suggested that not one of them would have reflected on their given stories to the extent that they

did through attendance at the writing workshops. She went on to say that by actively going through the process of reflection you would be more likely to carry it on into future stories of classroom experience. Aemee noted that she herself had done this while on a teaching practice, held during the middle two weeks of the story group meetings. Maria felt that by looking at specific successes she was able to isolate principles of sound practice that she could later incorporate into her teaching. She summarised this point by saying, “Well that lesson was a success because such and such happened, so if I use those same principles it will lead to more success.”

Each of the participating teachers liked the discussion times best as they were able to get feedback and “talk around” a range of different stories. Through it, the teachers were able to articulate their own experiences and have them validated by their peers. Hence, both storytelling and reflection are a means of constructing a “teaching self”.

Sarah felt that by looking at stories critically she was able to receive another point of view that would more often than not balance *her* way of looking at things. In this way, Sarah found the process of critiquing a very useful process. Sarah further suggested that the timing of critique work made a difference as to how you perceived the event. That is, if you had viewed the given event a week later you would “write” a different story, as the things going around you at the time would influence your decision-making. This however does not make the

story any less valid, if anything, it serves to broaden the possibilities and meaning of the experience for the teacher concerned.

Maria saw the process of critiquing as a way of sharing ideas with others as well as a means of getting to know teachers that you may come into contact with in the future. Aemee went so far as to say that through critiquing you are able to form a relationship – be it a friendship or comradeship – with the other members of the story group.

The value of a similar program at the pre-service level...

Maria felt that such a program would be really valuable at the pre-service level. She felt that you can learn so much, most of it new, and that it would be beneficial to reflect on what you have been learning as you go along. The *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching* is aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning practices (1996, p. 3). Contained within the framework are vignettes revealing the “complex, ambiguous and personal nature of teaching” (1996, p. 3). Such vignettes serve to encourage “collegial dialogue and reflection on professional practice” (1996, p. 3). Maria and her story group colleagues suggested that ‘collegial dialogue’ is essential for reflection and discussion on early teaching experiences. They see it as a way of exploring the possibilities available to them as teachers and a means of defining what is and is not ‘good practice’. Maria further suggested that such a process – talk and

storying around teaching – is a very natural thing to do, likening it to the talk that goes on in the café after teaching practices. Both Thomas (1995, p. 3) and Bruner (1990) see it as a natural process, a process that addresses “something profound within the human psyche”. Sarah followed on from this comment by saying that the noise level rises in the café after teaching practices as everyone has got so much to say. She also stated that such talking and catching up is some of the most valuable learning they do at university. Sarah suggested that a story group program would work best in second and third year as you have made it through first year and understand what university life and studying is all about. Aemee thought that it would also be useful to run such a program after the main ten week teaching practice so that you could share and learn from everybody’s experiences.

I feel that as well as discussing the benefits of formalised teacher talk – story exchanges – it is important to address the limitations and/or problems. For example, does formalising teacher talk validate it? Is it not already validated in the café and other such informal environments? Would formalising teacher exchanges take away the spontaneity of what is said? Could formalising the stories and conversations confuse or eradicate the true meaning of what is shared? Further still, could it undermine the honesty of the storytellers and what they decide to share? Such questions raise a number of different issues, namely that of the purpose of telling and listening to stories in more formal environments. However, they would need to be addressed carefully if a similar

program to this story group were to be run at the pre-service level, especially if the power and core meanings of the stories were to be lost.

The value of a similar program at the graduate level...

Aemee answered this question beautifully with a simple, “Oh absolutely.” Maria felt that when she started teaching she would have to find at least one other teacher whom she could meet regularly with so that she could share her experiences. And as mentioned earlier, Sarah assumed that such a story network existed and that if there were not one in the district of her school then she would create her own. Sarah supported her point by saying that she could not imagine teaching in an “isolated sort of manner” and that she would want to engage in that “sort of stuff”. Once again, it is helpful to mention the work of Lortie (1975) and Nias (1989) who assert the importance of breaking down teacher isolation and Hargreaves (cited in Fullan, 1997, pp. 3, 56) who advocates genuine teacher collaboration as fundamental to school improvement.

Why the story group members were glad they joined...

Maria was glad that she had participated in the writing workshops as it had allowed her to meet new people and listen to the stories that they had to share. Sarah too, really enjoyed listening to other people’s experiences. Aemee liked realising the fact that, “Hey, these people are going through the exactly same

things as me.” Maria also liked this side of the workshops. Furthermore, Maria saw it as a way of having a break from university study and teaching preparation, however, she still acknowledged it to be a time of focusing on “teaching and learning stuff.” Sarah saw the story group meetings to be filled with validating processes. Maria went on from here, beautifully capturing the thought with, “It’s a validated chat.”

* * *

Discussion:

Where to from here...Our thoughts on the story group and its processes

Both the participants and myself believe that a program similar to the story group should be incorporated into the pre-service years at university. We believe that such a program would work best when implemented into the second and third year, as this is the time when students are doing most of their learning about teaching and learning. One of the participants, Aemee, also suggested that a story group program be implemented into the course after the students have finished their main ten-week teaching practice.

Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. xvi) suggest that teachers use 'personal narratives' "to learn, to respond, to reflect, and to evaluate". Clandinin, Davies, Hogan and Kennard (1993, p. 11) further develop this suggestion when they assert that student teacher learning should not be "a separate preparation for something disconnected from what came before and a readying for what (will) come after". Rather, they assert that teacher education should be a part of the "ongoing writing" of the pre-service teachers' lives (Clandinin, et al., 1993, p. 11). All of the participants believe that the formation of story groups is vital if learning of all types is to be shared and consolidated. Each of the participants found my story group sessions to be very relaxed, open and non-threatening. The degree of openness, especially, is what the teachers warmed to and hoped

that they would be able to continue and translate such processes into their teaching. I found such conclusions to be very encouraging and reaffirming as I had felt the same needs while going through the teacher education course myself. As I went through the course, I found there to be only one or two teachers who were interested in thinking at a deeper level about teaching and learning. To have a group of teachers say that they were looking for the same things was exciting, and something I would love to see taken into consideration for continuing pre-service teachers.

As a way of encouraging pre-service teacher thinking about teaching and learning at a deeper level, I believe that teacher educators could use models of reflective practice as a basis for university courses. Such models engage teachers in systematic problem posing about their *own* teaching and learning experiences; that is, it is research about themselves and *their* concerns (Hattam, Brown & Smyth, n.d., p. 12, 13). One of the well-known reflective practice models is the Action Research Process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) where teachers are taken through the ‘moments’ (Grundy, 1998, p. 18) of ‘reconnaissance’, ‘plan’, ‘act and observe’ and ‘reflect’. A second model of use to teachers is Hattam, Brown and Smyth’s (n.d., p. 5) Model for Action. This particular model has teachers working in a group to actively seek solutions to issues that arise in their local school communities. Teachers move as a group through the phases of: affiliate, examine, represent, interrupt, take action, re-examine and checking out.

The participants suggested that such a story network would be most beneficial in the “real world” of teaching. Three of the participants stated outright that they would not be able to survive if they did not have an outlet to make some “noise” and share their stories from the chalk-face. The fourth participant went on to say that by getting such stories down in writing, you are able to reflect upon them at a later date. In this way, you are able to learn many things from a single story and at different stages of your career.

Furthermore, story networks could serve as: a way of breaking down teacher isolation; a forum for forming friendships and comradeship; an ideal place for resource meetings; a place for giving and receiving positive and constructive feedback; and, a positive promotion of teaching to the community. More importantly than this, however, the information gained from such networks could serve to improve teachers’ practice and hence teaching and learning experiences for children.

So, who should play a part in story groups?

The participants found that a mixture of pre-service teachers and “real” teachers worked well. This was quite by accident – or necessity really – as I had originally planned to work only with pre-service teachers. However, as the weeks ticked by I found it necessary to open my invitation to fourth year students – post-graduate students. Having one of the members being a teacher

who had been “out there” for a number of years meant that the other participants had someone to look up to. By looking up to Kate, they were able to gain an insight into the possibilities of teaching and learning experiences. From Kate’s story alone, the other participants felt that they had been encouraged to take bigger risks in their classroom practice. In essence, it allowed them to look at the views through windows that they had previously not been aware of or taken the time to contemplate.

I also found it interesting that each of the participants saw me as their mentor. I found this quite hard to fathom as I was the second youngest there and had only been teaching for three-quarters of a year. I do not know whether this was because I had experienced life on the other side – but then again Kate had too – or because I had developed the writing workshops, which they had all enjoyed and seemed to gain so much from. I was not prepared for such an identity at all, and was amazed at the assumed power that came with it. I think if I ran another set of story group sessions, I would take the role of “another teacher” or at the very outside the role of facilitator. Through running the workshops I found that handing over the decision-making to the participants not only empowered them, it empowered me. I think this was because I was able to observe and listen closely to all that went on, and in a way that I never would have been able to, had I kept with the role of detached researcher.

So, was it just storytelling?

The story group sessions certainly included the sharing and writing of stories, however they also included the sharing of teacher knowledge and expertise. As a result of this, on many occasions the workshops would turn, although not completely, into resource meetings where each of the participants would ignite in others, ideas and tips for teaching and learning experiences. This included the swapping of good story book titles, hints for dealing with other teachers and means of organising set teaching and learning experiences. I found it an absolute joy to watch, as before my very eyes I was able to see things unfold that I never imagined could be possible. That is, I had planned for “such and such” to happen, but instead had a whole lot more eventuate. Thinking back on the story group sessions I am glad that I swapped between the roles of researcher, facilitator and participant as it allowed me to be flexible where necessary. It also allowed me to sit back and observe the interactions of the participants.

The placement of critiquing in the workshops...

I am of the opinion that, if I ran a second series of story group workshops, I would have the process of critiquing play a smaller role, mainly because the sharing of stories – successes and non-successes – was what connected these teachers to one another. By sharing their stories these teachers had to reflect upon them anyway, and the listener responses served to give them the feedback

they required. I would still include it intermittently, especially if the group ran over a long period of time, but not every week. Over the four weeks, the process of critiquing, supported by the use of a critique form (Appendix One), ran for two of them, serving to make it a little long-winded for the participants.

Critiquing *is* necessary and it definitely served to inform these participants of their beliefs and tendencies, however, I think it would have worked better if we had engaged in storytelling more, especially since it was the discussions and sharing of stories that they clung and warmed to. At first, the idea of critiquing seemed too difficult to them, however after they engaged in it for a period of time they actually wanted to keep going as they were gaining so many different viewpoints about themselves and their work. At the same time however, they felt that time for story sharing, particularly at the beginning of the workshop process, was more important than consistently addressing the meanings of stories.

In hindsight, raising questions during times of discussion and story sharing could have provided the same function as the critique form. This would have made the process of critiquing less formalised for the participants and allowed them to concentrate on just listening and comprehending, as opposed to, listening, comprehending and writing. In essence, although the form was useful for giving concrete feedback to these participants, it contributed little to the process of reflection. Hence, the sharing of stories and the responses of these participants would have been sufficient in themselves. That is, had there been

more time, there would not have been a need to short-circuit the process of story sharing, or to sacrifice the natural discourse and reflections of these teachers with a formalised critique schedule.

Would a larger story group have worked better?

Having a story group comprised of four teachers worked effectively, however I feel that it would have worked even better had we had more members. Having a larger size group would have enabled us to split up into smaller groups, and go through the processes of storytelling and critiquing in greater detail. I also feel that in smaller groups people tend to share more, as it is less confronting having to express your thoughts and feelings to only a few people – especially when the subject of talk involves you at the centre of discussion. And this is why I feel my particular story group worked well, because it was small in number and the participants felt comfortable in each other's presence. The fact that the members felt close enough to call one another friends is evidence enough.

The sharing of stories other than success stories...

If I ran a second series of story group workshops I would have the participating teachers share non-successes as well as successes. We were able to do this in the first and subsequent workshops although not to the extent that I would have liked. I feel that the sharing of non-successes deepened this group's collective

sense of “success”. The participants picked up on this too, although they did find the sharing of success stories very beneficial. I feel that it would have complemented the success stories even more and opened the participants’ eyes to further meanings about their teaching. Furthermore, the sharing of all and any teaching story would reap a lot of benefits as it would be a way of relating to others meaningfully, as well as a means of forming and operating on a common ground. Also, sharing non-successes is an invitation to others. It encourages them to share in processes of problem solving and reflection – what works and why – a means of deepening trust if the participants are willing to be seen as vulnerable and human.

The art of snowballing...

This is something that I would very much like to encourage in the story group members, as it would allow the group to grow in number and meaning. Some of the participants mentioned the fact that they would definitely invite their friends to come and participate if they knew another story group series were to be held. This was very encouraging to me as it made it all seem worthwhile, that I had indeed empowered them in some way and that they would further engage in processes that enabled them to grow and develop in meaningful ways. It also gave me the confidence to continue running the group for those participants who wanted to keep on meeting. At present, we have decided to meet weekly for lunch at the university café. The participants saw it as a way of being able to

keep on sharing their ideas, concerns and questions in story form and in an environment that appreciated their goal of teacher and personal development.

* * *

Conclusions:

Daring to go beyond the cute...

By addressing the success story of my work and making it 'problematic' I am able to see things from yet another vantage point, and discover things that I had started to take for granted. That is, by viewing my work through a different lens of teaching and teacher research, I am able to view things I was previously unaware of. For example, did my participants *really* engage in the process of critical reflection or did they just generally reflect at the surface level? (Tripp, 1993). Likewise, did my participants place their stories and reflections in contexts that allowed them to see the deeper social and political issues (Smyth, 1992) or did they once again only gain insight into those issues that resided on the surface? Would it have made a significant difference to these teachers' personal-professional development had they placed their stories in contexts that addressed issues lying below the surface? Would they have been able to see things that story sharing and "surface" reflection alone could not have shown them? These are big questions, but ones that need to be addressed if I am going to gain a real understanding of my work. By attempting to answer these questions, I hope to set apart the successful components of my research from the not so successful, and the possibilities of teacher story sharing from the limitations. In essence, I hope to critique my work in a way that goes about the process of 'telling' in the most honest and meaningful way.

I believe my work was essentially a success story, as it achieved what I set out to achieve and more. Included below, are some key reasons why I believe my research should be viewed as a success. Each of the reasons is interrelated and more often than not builds on from the one before it. However, for purposes of discussion and reflection I have decided to divide them up.

- *Confidence*

All of the participants, except Kate, appeared to have a lot of self-doubts related to their capabilities as teachers. It could be said that this contributed somewhat to their having low self-esteem. Phrases such as, “I can’t”, “I’d never be able to do that” and “I’d never think of doing that” featured consistently in the story group meetings. When such expressions of teacher self-doubt were made, the other participants would respond automatically with words of encouragement and affirmation. These positive comments served to boost and acknowledge these teachers’ personal and professional attributes, at least in the setting of the story group meetings.

The difference in the participants’ confidence levels over the four weeks changed dramatically, although this could have had more to do with friendships than engaging in the processes of story sharing. Each of the teachers were more willing to assert their thoughts and feelings regarding particular teaching experiences and issues as time went on. They were also more willing to give and

receive constructive advice and feedback. However, the giving and receiving of positive feedback was more of a regular occurrence. Hence, it could be said that these teachers' need for personal-professional affirmation was stronger than their need for teacher change and development. It could also be said that they needed building up before they could thoughtfully consider the more critical advice of their colleagues. That is, personal-professional affirmation was a necessary precursor to their change and development as teachers; they needed to be affirmed by their colleagues as both people and professionals before they could begin to further develop in their thinking about teaching and learning.

I believe that this group of teachers' participation in the story groups gave them a certain degree of confidence, especially regarding their future teaching practice. For example, Sarah stated the fact that she now saw the need to take more significant risks in her teaching, as well as to value the trait of perseverance. Likewise, Maria discovering that she values lessons that are enjoyable for her students *and* herself. Gaining such insights into themselves and their teaching practice allowed these participants to learn new and exciting things that they could later choose to incorporate into their teaching. And I believe that, in part, it was through the positive acknowledgements of others that the participating teachers felt confident enough to address new "surface" issues in their teaching.

- *Breaking Barriers*

The processes of teaching and teacher education do not have to be lonely enterprises. Teachers can share and operate in ‘collaborative’ and ‘participatory’ ways, just as my participants have suggested. This particular story group served as a forum for the participants to get to know one another. Only Sarah and Maria previously knew one another. Relationships arose out of the group and to the extent that the three pre-service teachers wanted to keep meeting with one another and myself on a regular basis.

The story group and its processes also served to break down some of the barriers put up by individual participants, barriers that blocked the way to personal and professional self-esteem development and enhancement. Such barriers were broken through positive and affirming interactions with others. They were also broken through time, as the story group workshops progressed.

Most of the participating teachers were aware of the benefits of reflection, however, I feel that the benefits of critical reflection, at least at the general level, was something that was further built upon throughout the workshops. I do not think that these participants realised the extent to which they could learn about themselves and their practice through stories and story sharing. Furthermore, I feel that the data from the critique forms complemented their realisations, as it allowed them to see some of the ways in which stories can be “read” and

analysed. Although, as mentioned previously, the function of the critique form and indeed the process of critiquing, could have been achieved in a less formalised way through the use of questioning in the discussion segments of the workshops.

- *Skill-Building Processes*

There are a variety of skill-building processes related to teacher personal-professional development including teacher story telling, active listening, critical reflection and peer affirmation and encouragement.

The telling and retelling of meaningful stories can be carried out informally in the university café or school staff room or formally within the setting of a story group. Such story sharing can lead to the establishment of teacher networks that are long lasting and supportive of real personal and professional development.

Peer support can be enhanced when teachers *actively* listen to the stories of others, as they are more often than not reminded of stories from their own experience. Such listening and reflection upon past experience can result in teachers engaging in the process of rethinking, a process which can serve to inform their future teaching practice.

By reflecting upon their own and others' stories, Jalongo and Isenberg (1995, p. 7) believe that teachers can use narrative to learn about themselves – “a mirror”

– and others, – “a window”. They suggest that story sharing and reflection are ways of connecting the past with the present and future, as well as a means of forging meaningful connections with people (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, pp. xxi, 7). One way in which teachers can forge meaningful relationships with their peers is by acknowledging personal and professional attributes and skills. Through such acknowledgement, teachers can be encouraged to further develop and enhance their practice and self in meaningful and relevant ways. Personal affirmation and praise are powerful tools as they are often the precursors to individual change and reflection. Furthermore, the fact that others believe in their abilities can encourage teachers to see sides of themselves in different lights. And if willing, this can allow them to grow and develop in personally and professionally meaningful ways.

- *Sustaining a Commitment to Teaching*

By regularly meeting with others to share, listen, write and critique issues collaboratively, teachers have the opportunity to form trusting relationships. Such relationships, suggests Hargreaves (1997, p. 3), can encourage risk-taking and openness amongst teachers. By listening to others and the stories that they share, teachers are able to listen and reflect upon the underlying meanings of stories. This can enable them to pursue and sustain their commitment to teaching. Furthermore, by engaging in narrative processes collaboratively, in relaxed, supportive and non-threatening environments, I believe that teachers are

more likely to contribute in meaningful and purposeful ways, as opposed to ways that are distilled and superficial. Such ways can serve to enhance teacher personal-professional development, and hence, help to sustain their commitment to their chosen profession of primary school teaching.

- *Ways of Enhancing Teacher Personal-Professional Development*

Within this story group, we helped to make success a consistent and affirming experience for one another by allowing room for the telling and retelling of “success” stories. It could be said, that this in part, helped to facilitate teacher personal-professional development, enabling these teachers to address things about themselves and their teaching that they were previously unaware of. Such personal-professional development was achieved in a collaborative fashion, with each of the participants contributing to the various processes of narrative inquiry. It had to do with each of them sharing together in authentic and meaningful ways, as well as, working towards the common goal of becoming more effective and informed teachers.

One way, in which this particular group of teachers felt that they could continue to achieve at this goal of becoming more informed teachers, was through the presence of a teacher-mentor, who they saw in this case to be myself. They believed that a teacher-mentor could provide a link to the “real” world of teaching, and as a result of this, inspire and encourage them in their

development through story and ideas sharing. They further believed that teacher-mentors would be a valuable presence in any story group network, as they would have the capacity to promote personal-professional development through their teaching experience and expertise.

Limitations...

Hence, my work can be seen to be successful on a number of levels. However, it also has its limitations, which become clear when I consider it in terms of critical practitioner research. That is, research that combines elements of Tripp's (1993) and Goodson's (1992) social and political frameworking – placing teacher stories in 'problematic' and *real* social contexts. My work stops short of doing this, as I had this group of teachers focus their reflections at the "surface" level of stories embedded in children and classroom teaching. That is, they did not attempt to address any of the deeper social and political issues related to teaching and learning that existed in their stories, such as gender stereotyping.

- *The nature of narrative*

The power of narrative is such that it embodies the dramatic and the interesting, but not necessarily the 'problematic' or critical. Narrative achieves very well at the personal level – the issues resting just under the surface – but not necessarily at the deeper level. Achieving at a deeper level requires looking critically at the

bigger social and political issues in a collective way (Goodson, 1992). It is worth noting however, that the creation of stories that are socially and politically contextualised may erase and gloss over the author's intended meanings and thinking, serving to lose the power of its content. That is, the original story or meaning may be lost due to the shared story being "worked" and critically reflected upon too many times; it may no longer seem like the original author's story and their intended focus may shift. And it is these more personal and accessible teacher stories that many teachers so keenly warm and relate to.

- *The way teachers talk*

Holly (1989) suggests that teachers talk in reaffirming and 'conservative' ways. She believes that this is especially the case among women, as they prefer to engage in the practice of affirmation as opposed to argumentation. As a result of this, their stories are often more personalised (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Teachers most often relate through quick anecdotes – short stories that capture the detail necessary to convey meaning. Furthermore, teachers usually only have time to relate a little of what they could if they had more time. The factor of time also means that teachers may not be able to share or reflect at a deeper and more significant level.

I am now aware of the significance of looking at teaching events, as well as my own work more critically. This awareness was brought about through reading

Goodson's (1992) work on the need to get past individual stories. That is, we must look at the context of the story and not just the personal. Furthermore, we need to open up our stories to the wider world of teaching and see how they relate to the bigger issues of teaching and teacher education. Tripp (1993) suggests that we turn our stories into 'critical incidents' so that we can look at things from different perspectives. Tripp (1993, p. 8) further suggests that we make "value judgements" about our work and teaching beliefs. And as such, we should work at attaching appropriate amounts of "significance...to the meaning of the incident" (Tripp, 1993, p. 8). For example, Maria portrayed gender stereotyping in her story however she probably did not realise it, or see the need to value or discuss it, at the pre-service level. Rather, she saw it at the surface level of making a lesson "work", a means of making dancing enjoyable for boys who were unenthusiastic.

Looking at the success contained within stories critically and shaping them into 'critical incidents' does not take away the success element, rather it challenges and deepens it. Critical reflection can make stories multi-dimensional allowing teachers to glean more from their teaching experiences on a number of different levels, namely, – personal, professional, collaborative and individual. However, the art of true critical reflection is a difficult one, and one that I presume can only be developed by engaging in it over many years. This would allow it to become a natural part of the way that we practice and learn – a way of impacting on the learning and lives of our students.

So, how do teachers learn?

I believe that teachers learn through two main avenues. Firstly, through narrative as they create stories about what they do. And secondly, through each other, as they share in supportive, relaxed and non-threatening environments. However, I have recently discovered a third avenue that I believe teachers learn through and that is through the process of critical reflection – reflection that explores the core meanings and issues of stories. In essence, I believe that these three avenues of learning are necessary for true teacher personal-professional development – development that is honest and long lasting. More importantly than this, however, development that benefits the children within their care in meaningful and purposeful ways.

As way of summary, I hope that the story group members will continue to learn and reflect, to sustain their commitment to primary school teaching and to enhance their personal-professional development in honest and meaningful ways. I also hope that they will continue to meet with other teachers, both now and in the future, so that they may share their stories, listen to the experiences of others and learn in ‘collective’ and ‘participatory’ ways. After all, when teachers relate stories of their practice they “forge connections” between themselves and their listeners and between their “writers and readers” (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 175). Such ‘connections’ are necessary if teachers are going to break

down the barriers of teacher isolation and improve their practice in personally and professionally relevant ways.

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Appendix One:

Based, in part, on Frigga Haug's Memory-worksheet (cited in Schratz & Walker, 1995, p. 46) and Kamler's questions for reading texts (1997/98, p. 15).

Teacher's name: _____ Reviewer's name: _____

Title of story: _____

The success...	The development of the success...	Emphasis attributed to the success...	Use and type of language used...
Blind spots, gaps in the story...	Construction of the author/teacher...	Construction of others in the story...	The relationship between the author/teacher and others in the story...
What does the story say about this teacher as a <i>person</i> ? A <i>professional</i> ?	What doesn't fit? What contradictions, if any, emerge?	What have you found out about this teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning?	What was powerful about the writing?

Appendix Two:

The Wedding

By *Kate*

I am nervous, will the bride fit into my old dress? Will she be able to carry out this drama? It is a lot to ask of a ten-year old. The groom is a shy boy but his mum is a helper and she assures me that they have been through the ceremony lots of times. I've never actually been the parent of a bride and I think I know what it must be like. Will the groom leave her at the altar? Will the bride's mother break down? All these little details had been rehearsed in the classroom but not by myself. I hadn't actually been a part of the preparation, that had been their *male* teacher's role!

As the teacher Librarian I had made great plans to celebrate Book Week. Each class was going to enjoy a celebration of some kind. Weeks of harrowing thinking and planning had seen two classes successfully enjoy their celebrations, but now it was Year Three's big event: "The Wedding" – right down to the sponge cake with bright pink icing.

I can see her

It is now ten forty and there are lots of little squeals coming from the girls' toilet block. I think I know what they are laughing about. Happy laughter at least, full of anticipation. There are a few boys beginning to assemble in the library. They seem sort of bewildered by all the girls' laughter. Some of them don't seem to have any idea what is going to happen or why (Maybe they won't on their wedding day either!).

The music is playing softly and the students are sitting waiting. There is a car in the assembly area. Everyone cranes to look out of the doorway. There are a few parents waiting on the verandah with cameras and the Principal is smiling from ear to ear behind his office window.

A well dressed young man (Bride's father) steps out of the car and proceeds to open the back door. Our steps a most radiant Bride, beaming with delight. All the girls watching do exactly as one would have expected. They all coo and Ahhh at the pretty dress!

The bridesmaids all take their place in line and the music swells. Everyone is asked to stand for the Bride to come into the building. One by one the bridesmaids march in and then the Bride and her father follow. I cannot believe it is exactly like a real wedding.

The Priest and the Groom await the girls and when all are in their places the students sit down. There are some surprised smiles and a lot of whispering going on in the building. I cannot believe this is going so well. After a few words the Priest reads out his part and the different people respond. Including the Parents of the Bride who give their consent. All is going so well.

The music swells and the people sing a song that they all know (I cannot remember which one, I think it was an Elvis Presley Chapel song). The tape played and the students sang like well-rehearsed parrots. The rings were exchanged. Then came the moment everyone had been waiting for, the KISS. The Groom blushed while the Bride planted a beauty on his cheek. Everyone approved with delight. Next they signed their names on a piece of card. Photos were taken and then everyone was asked to stand and welcome Mr. and Mrs. Celebration.

Students hurried outside to kiss the Bride, to look at her or just talk to her. It was all so real!!! After some mingling we headed back inside to relax and eat. Lunch was a huge success and while we did not have any speeches, there were lots of happy children who ate, danced to the disco music and then waited for the Bride and Groom to cut the cake.

More music, more eating cake and drinking punch. Photos were taken outside on the lawn of the families and then the children drifted back to the schoolyard to join others who were anxious to hear about “The Wedding”.

After quick clean up and a cup of coffee it was on to the next class who were doing a Circus Carnival celebration.

Appendix Three:

Even the Boys Danced

By Maria

I love to dance and was excited about teaching dance to a class of year seven's at a local Bunbury school. The dance style focused on was oriented towards creative Egyptian, as this linked to their social science topic of 'Ancient Civilisations'.

As a class we viewed Michael Jackson's "Remember the Time" video clip and brainstormed different "Egyptian" inspired dance moves. The class seemed to be as enthused as I was.

This all changed the following week when it was discovered that other classes were playing football, soccer and other game-centred activities.

"Miss, dance is for girls."

"Why can't we play footy?"

"This is dumb."

...Whined several of the boys.

Although disheartened by this response I decided to continue with the six-week dance program. However, upon reflection of my planned activities, and taking into consideration the students' complaints, I did make some adjustments to the program. I moved away from the traditional dance type activities. Instead I leant towards fun and non-threatening activities that would take the pressure off the year seven's – an important consideration for students at this age that are particularly self-conscious. The students would be allowed to bring in and choose the music they wanted to dance to and I would ensure that I would join in during the activities, acting "silly" like everyone else.

At the beginning of the third week, Steven – the "leader" of the year seven boys, complained of a "sore knee" (a football injury) and stated that he just wouldn't be able to dance that day. Several other "injuries" emerged from the class – all suffered by boys, all from the same peer group, all belonging to the same football team.

With the "injured" boys sitting on the sidelines I continued on with the planned lesson. As a class we played tag games, relays, Follow the Leader and mirroring and the students were then able to choose pieces of sporting equipment to go through movement and spatial awareness activities.

One by one, the boys recovered from their injuries they previously were suffering from and began participating. Eventually the whole class was

involved, including an athletic Steven! Students were even suggesting choreography and music that they could bring in for next week's lesson.

The six weeks went by way too quickly. The students seemed to like using a wide range of music, both ethnic and contemporary, and especially enjoyed using the equipment. Although, due to some unforeseen near accidents, rules were very quickly established with regards to the use of the long sticks and poles!!! At the conclusion of the program the students even prepared and performed a dance routine to their peers and other classes. It was great to see them all up on the stage! Especially when they were performing their own choreographed pieces. To me that was the success of this story – happy students and a happy teacher!

Appendix Four:

Second Time Chances

By Aemee

Many years had come and gone since the days when, as a young schoolgirl, I used to pretend to “mark” my storybooks! It was now the day of my first professional teaching practice as a student teacher. As you could imagine, I was aptly prepared from all those years of “pretend” teaching! So I had nothing to worry about right? Wrong!

I had only very limited exposure to the classroom from an adult perspective and due to this fact was expecting a sinking, “Titanic” experience! Not because I was nervous about it, or scared of the children, because I was actually really looking forward to having thirty-two sets of young eyes staring at me in anticipation. I absolutely love children and being around them. The reason for my apprehension was due to the fact that I was not sure if I knew how to motivate or manage these energetic, enthusiastic and *very* independent individuals!

Luckily the class was halved due to a computer lesson, so I was eased into it, so to speak! My concern for originality and motivation in the classroom led me to

start the lesson with an unusual introduction. I stood holding the class globe and sang: “I’ve got the whole world in my hands”. This had the desired effect...they were intrigued!

After explaining and discussing the importance of using globes and maps in our lives, and asking a child to point out where we lived on the globe, I explained the proceeding task. What I thought was a relatively straightforward task brought a few unforeseen “icebergs”. These obstacles, though small, were significant enough to hinder the fluency of the activity.

The actual task was for the children to interpret information on one world map and represent a list of major countries on another world map of their own. They had to colour these countries in and reference them on a key.

The first “iceberg” that we hit was the fact that the map I had given out for referencing was a different world spread to their individual outline maps. This hindered the children by confusing them about where to locate the actual countries. For example, rather than Australia being central on their map, as it was on the reference map, it was on the right-hand side. The second major “iceberg” was the confusion generated by the borders of Canada, the United States and Mexico. The children all seemed to have a common difficulty in representing these places on their maps and I was finding myself constantly helping students with the same problems. Nevertheless the lesson was

completed in the allocated time and the children got something out of it. They also enjoyed it, which is always an important bonus.

Before I knew it, it was time to change over groups and implement the same lesson with the children who had just come back from computing. I really appreciated the opportunity of teaching the same lesson twice in succession. This gave me a chance to adapt my strategies and I was able to avoid any potentially disruptive “icebergs” along the way!

I was more relaxed and confident the second time around as that dreaded ‘first ever lesson’ was out of the way! I introduced the subject in exactly the same way, with the globe and the song, as I thought this was an effective motivator last time. This time it worked even better! The children joined in with my singing and seemed to not only be enjoying themselves, but also looking forward to finding out what was involved in the lesson. The increased confidence I had helped me to stop the whole class and repeat instructions when it appeared necessary, and the insight I had into possible problems enabled me to concentrate particularly on clarifying from the onset.

In hindsight, I am glad to say that I feel I learnt a lot from this teaching experience. I decided to use the same introduction for both lessons as it successfully motivated the children and gained their attention, it was something slightly different and all parties seemed to enjoy it. I know I did! The second

implementation of the lesson was a great benefit. I felt more relaxed and knew what to expect. I had an idea of the time needed to complete the task, I had insight into what the children's questions might be, I knew some of the problems the children may encounter and I was aware of the children's interests and abilities. This all helps towards a successful experience for all.

I feel this lesson was successful, especially the second time around, due to being aware of any potential "icebergs". As they say... "Practice makes progress". I do not believe in perfection, but I do believe there is no harm in striving for it...especially where our children's futures are concerned.

Appendix Five:

Work, Work, Aargh : Think, Think, Ah Ha

By Sarah

In our third year of our Bachelor of Education, as part of a project partnership between ECU and local primary schools, Jane and I were given the topic Number Sense and Mental Math to prepare lessons for junior primary. We planned five weeks of different activities to develop mental math skills in a single classroom including a range of assessments. When we were able to consult with our teacher, she told us that the school had been expecting us to work with four interested teachers (the whole of the junior primary) using all twelve activities and assessments we had planned. Jane and I thought this was a huge joke – just imagine making resources to use with that many students, let alone the time factor. The teacher agreed and assured us that she would renegotiate the project with the principal and lecturer. After “negotiation” we found we were expected to present the activities over five weeks to four different classes each Wednesday morning.

We said that was impossible, but agreed to present Think Boards to all four classes. So over the next week we made nine Think Boards with nine green

cardboard boxes filled of Real Things and sets of starter questions for each board at six different levels. We felt we had been given a pretty raw deal.

Week One: Work, Work, Arargh

We understood the Think Board concept well and were confident about teaching them, but some of the practical problems we encountered knocked us for six. Through the first morning we taught Think Boarding for forty minutes in each classroom, which left us no time between classes. In theory the students should work in cooperative groups, discussing together the three solutions they need to find. But most responded like Sarah, who put her hands over her side of the board and insisted “This is mine, I’m doing it!” and Adam who was punching his best mate in the arm whispering, “Give me back the box, I’m doing Real Things”. Since students sitting at one side of the board took control of that side, one student was always left with nothing to do. Trying to turn the board for his turn at Real Things, Brian knocked cans of pencils over the floor and poked Sally with the corner. Few others even tried to turn their boards so they kept practicing the same skill over and over. In the lower grades, straws, shells, buttons, and hundreds of beans were sprayed across the classroom floors as children investigated the contents of the boxes. Beans went into ears and toothpicks went up noses. We sped from group to group answering vital questions such as, “How do you spell seven Miss?” We waited patiently to scribe the younger children’s tortured stories as other groups called out and

waved their arms. All these problems were right in our faces as we sat exhausted outside the classroom, but the solutions were harder to identify.

Think, Think, Ah Ha!

We thought and we talked over the next week and made some changes. We reduced the number of children at each board to three. We made the boards smaller with rounded corners so they were easy to turn. We encouraged the students to work on the floor where they had more space and were more comfortable. Eventually the children began to relinquish control of 'their' side and help each other. We placed the Real Things in see-through snap lock bags to reduce the children's need to tip things out just to look at them. We replaced the beans and toothpicks with strings of coloured beads. We encouraged reluctant writers to tell their stories orally when we came to check their completed board. We trialed strips around the board that illustrated each representation: Real Things stuck under contact, numbers in words, numbers in figures and pictures. This minimised the need to spell numbers and enabled the children to easily see where each representation should go.

Week Two: Work, Work, Aaargh!

Clearing up the Think boards and setting them up in the next classroom was a nightmare. With nine Think Boards, story papers, pictures, questions, boxes of

straws, beads, shells, toothpicks etc. spread around the classroom Jane would tap her watch and say “Three minutes to the next class!” Soon we’d be scrambling along the verandah clutching boards and boxes, with our carefully sequenced questions sliding out of their plastic sleeves and fluttering about us. We didn’t always make it on time. In the lower grades some students found it difficult to stay on task and despite keeping records of the work in each class, we could not tell which group had completed which problem.

Then the teachers started laying down the law:

- We should always write addition questions using three letter or one syllable words and using the words “more” and “altogether”.
- We should never add different things together.
- We should present multiplication problems to the older class.

Think, Think, Ah Ha

We were doubtful about the value of changing the addition problems, but complied so “I had two rabbits. Then I was given three cats. Now I have five pets altogether” became “I had two cats. Then I got three more cats. Now I have five cats altogether”. I wanted to motivated the students with jelly beans but Jane would have none of that, so we compromised and I created Think Board stickers on the computer and used these as motivators and rewards for students. We put the questions in a free standing concertina file, so carrying, tidying and

finding questions became easier, and created recording sheets for each group to use. The modified Think Boards had been helpful, so we changed all of them.

We also presented multiplication questions to one class as requested. This was a difficult thing to do as we could see that the students were not ready for multiplication problems, but in our position as student teachers we didn't have much choice but to comply.

Week Three: Work, Work, Aaargh

It rained and we hurried. Boards kept slipping out of the pile and we lost one (later found in the school office). Opening boxes in the next class we often found screwed up bits of paper and mixed up contents, or number cards missing. Since the last class of the day was the younger children who were at least able to sort things, we had no choice but to spend precious time sorting out the contents before the lesson could begin. The boxes were soggy by then and with the younger children's enthusiasm for getting the lids on tight they were soon in a sad way. The youngest children still struggled with the addition problems and the presentation of multiplication questions was a disaster. Many children just assumed that the \times was $+$, or said "times" but added. Many were able to give the correct answer to the orally presented \times question, but were unable to represent the question as groups of "lots of" in Real Things, pictures or stories. We spent most of the lesson teaching the concept of multiplication in small groups and

some children made great leaps in understanding, but others were just not ready for it, so we let it go and allowed them to add instead. The most frustrating thing about the debacle was the absence of the classroom teacher who had insisted on multiplication questions.

Think, Think, Ah Ha

We bought plastic take away boxes to replace all the cardboard ones. They were rain resistant and see through, so we could see whether the boxes had been properly tidied as we retrieved them from each group. We made a carry bag for all of the Think Boards (there's twelve now). We made a new set of question cards for the year one's using only single numbers.

Week Four: Work, Work, Aaargh

Despite our new efficiency, we were still hard pressed to record observations of students in the classes because the groups required constant help and assessment. Often we needed to spend time asking questions that helped the children to review their thinking so that they could discover their errors. This was rewarding, but time consuming and we had done little recording for the assignment, on which we would be assessed. The absent teacher returned and assured us she had revised times tables during the week. Many of the students

showed improvement, but we believed they would have benefited more from time spent on addition tasks.

Think, Think, Ah Ha

We renegotiated our assignment with our lecturer (we did this personally this time!) and asked the school teachers to let us spend our last week in one classroom only so we could take six children at a time and observe their use of Think Boards.

Week Five: Work, Work!

That experience was very rewarding. The children were enthusiastic and we were able to record a variety of thinking strategies. We were able to ask relevant questions to help the children review their thinking and see several of them make new connections or reinforce shaky ones.

Think, Think, Ah Ha

I decided that, despite our exhaustion and frustrations, this was a real success story in the end, not just because we enjoyed that last session so much, but because we persevered and the physical changes that we made to the Think Board reflected our beliefs about good educational practice.

For example...

- That if you are trying to teach mathematics, then you don't assess spelling.
- That individuals need to be responsible for the way they handle equipment.
- That every child is important and their time is valuable and should not be wasted.
- That children can learn a great deal from working cooperatively in groups.
- That understanding of mathematical concepts is more important than getting the right answer.
- That writing has a place in mathematics.
- That it is more important for teachers to ask the right question than to provide the right answer and that children work better when they are comfortable.
- That mathematics should be tangible and interesting (Real Things).

Appendix Six:

Jacinta Pinta

By Storyteller one

Once upon a time in a village far, far away called Bunbury, there lived a young girl called Jacinta Pinta. She was just an ordinary girl who had only one wish – to be the best possible teacher that she could be (at times this felt truly and utterly impossible).

Jacinta lived in the village with her mother, father and wicked (as in cool) sister, who fully supported her endeavor to become a teacher. This was Jacinta's last year at the teachers' college and she was quite nervous about having to begin her ten-week practical that began on the following day. The practical was to take place at one of the local primary schools in the small village.

Jacinta was very nervous about the next day and found it quite impossible to sleep that night. She tossed and turned for hours until finally she gave up and went off to make herself a glass of hot chocolate. There were a hundred questions going through Jacinta's head. What if the kids don't like me? What if I don't know an answer to one of their questions? What if? What if? What if? What if.....? Too many questions that could not be answered until the next

day, so Jacinta went to bed, read an Archie comic and for the second time that night attempted to go to sleep.

* * *

It was a bright and clear day on the 7th of April. Jacinta returned from her first day at school feeling happy and excited. The year one's were fantastic and she had established a good rapport with each child; a factor she regarded as highly important for effective teaching and learning to take place.

The next few weeks went by relatively smoothly until one day, a quite fragile little girl walked into the classroom with the saddest face Jacinta had ever seen. "Hi Melody. You don't look very happy today. Would you like to talk to me about anything?" The little girl automatically ran to Jacinta, tears streaming down her face as she held onto the teacher for dear life. "Mmy mum said that I was a t-t-terrible reader and that I was stupid because I didn't know some of the words in the book", Melody sobbed. Oh no! Jacinta thought. WHAT DO I DO? HOW DO I HANDLE THIS SO I DON'T MAKE THE MOTHER SEEM CRUEL AND WRONG? AAAARRRRRGHHH!!! Jacinta took a deep breath and hugged the little girl harder. "Let's go over here where we can talk all by ourselves. "Melody I have heard you read before and you area brilliant reader. Even when you don't know some of the words, you still have a go at reading them. To me, that makes you a great reader and I am sure that if your mum saw

how much effort you put into your reading, she would think you were great too!”

“No she wouldn’t, I think she is really mean.”

“Well, I tell you what, how about you read this book to me while your brother is here and he can tell your mum how good you are and I will have a talk with her and tell her how fantastic you are, okay?!”

Little Melody dried her tears and tentatively, without much confidence, began to read her story, perfectly reading all of the words.

“That was great Melody”, Jacinta and Paul said at the same time.

“How do you feel now Melody?”

“I feel pretty good. I read that whole book without making a mistake”. She smiled for the first time. Jacinta smiled back. “Even if you did make a mistake, that’s okay too because it helps you to learn for next time.”

“Thanks Miss Pinta.” Melody hopped along back to her own desk.

What happened that morning prompted Jacinta to write a letter home to all of the parents explaining how a child’s self-esteem is very fragile and parents need to be supportive and nurturing of their child’s attempt at learning. Melody’s mother was also asked to meet with Jacinta and Melody to discuss ways in which Melody could be encouraged.

From that day on, Melody came to school very happy and confident of her reading and everyone in the class, including Jacinta, lived happily, or quite happily ever after (at least for the next five weeks anyway).

Appendix Seven:

Untitled

By Storyteller two

I don't have a huge story to tell but sometimes I think that those small moments with children that make them smile are very meaningful and thus have a lasting effect.

In semester one, observational prac week, I had the opportunity to go into a remedial reading/spelling class. The teacher asked me to test the children on the set words for their particular level: one boy was struggling with his words and craving for a little attention.

In that lesson I spent time encouraging him, testing him and challenging him to do some revision/study of the words so that next time I tested him he would be able to move up to the next level. When I arrived the next day the boy ran up beaming, saying that he worked on the words last night and couldn't wait to be tested. I was so happy, the smile on his face was so rewarding. When the lesson came around the boy was so eager and he greatly improved his reading and moved up to the next level. He was so happy, it was amazing the results that a little bit of TLC and personal attention could bring about.

Appendix Eight:

Who's Doing the Learning?

By Storyteller three

I was in my third year of teaching, and had a job at an independent girls' school, taking secondary English. The students were great – most of them very bright and motivated to learn, and the school had extremely high expectations of staff. So there I was, as usual, up late at night preparing lessons for the next day. I was trying to write comprehension questions for a short story that the students were going to read, and I was finding it hard going, trying to phrase each question clearly, making sure I used different levels of questioning etc. Then I had a sudden mental picture of all my students – asleep, watching TV – certainly not working on their reading comprehension. It occurred to me that I was really good at reading, and that I was getting better at it every week as I slaved away designing tests and comprehension activities for my students. What would happen if I gave the students the responsibility for asking the questions? When I made up questions, I read and reread the text, exploring the finer points of meaning. If students did this, surely it would make a real difference to the quality of their reading and thinking? I stopped work and went to bed, determined to try out my theory in the morning.

My year 9 class were chatty and full of energy as usual, though they became more subdued as I handed out copies of short stories, a different story to each group. I explained that today, they were in the teacher's role. Each group was to read their story and design a set of questions that would help the next group of students to understand the story. They were a bit surprised at first, but got quickly to work, and before long there were lively discussions going on in all groups. I stopped them briefly at one point to recap the levels of questioning, but apart from that they worked solidly on the task for half an hour. The quality of their discussion and the questions they produced was outstanding, compared to the cursory effort that many of them would have put in on the standard comprehension task. I collected up the questions ready to be completed in tomorrow's lesson. There were a few minutes left so I got the students to give me feedback on the morning:

"It's much harder to ask good questions than to answer them."

"It was good to talk about the story and questions because you got to see how other people think."

"Now I finally understand what an inferential question is, because I had to write some."

So there were some other benefits that I hadn't even anticipated!

For me this was a success story because it made a profound difference to the way I teach, and because it wasn't a fancy "bells and whistles" strategy – it focused on the essentials, the absolute basics of English teaching.